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COMMONWEAL

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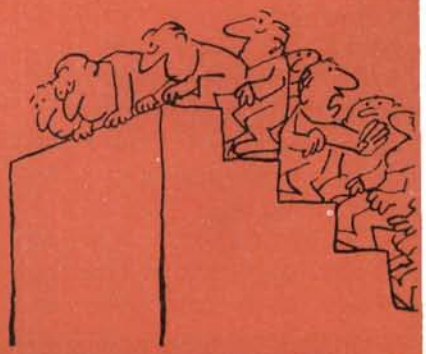

MENDING CATHOLIC MANNERS

Abigail McCarthy

REVIEWS:

DON WYCLIFF on Shelby Steele

CRYSTAL GROMER on Brian Moore

IVAN SANDERS on the Hapsburg Officer Corps

INCULTURATION & INCARNATION

Daniel J. O'Hanlon

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CORRESPONDENCE

Misplaced certitude

Rensselaer, Ind.

To the Editors: In their pastoral letters on peace and on economic justice, the U.S. bishops observe that the second part, where principles are applied to specific cases, does "not carry the same moral authority as our statements of universal moral principles." And J. Bryan Hehir [in a column on the Gulf crisis] states that "proportionality is a difficult criterion to invoke." But that does not prevent him from making some very dogmatic statements.

He says: "Those who tout a 'surgical air war' either don't understand the challenge or are simply deceptive." Is he speaking as a moral theologian or a military expert? If the latter, he needs to present his credentials. If the former, what authority does the statement carry? One could make the same assessment of other statements he makes.

I think that the presence of our troops in the Middle East is inappropriate. I do not, however, speak as a moral theologian or a military strategist, but as a concerned citizen. What I have to say is an opinion. I think it behooves moral theologians, when speaking on topics as complicated as warfare in the Middle East, to express their own opinions with a little less certitude, especially when a soldier's refusal to carry out the orders of a commanding officer is in question. CHARLES J. ROBBINS

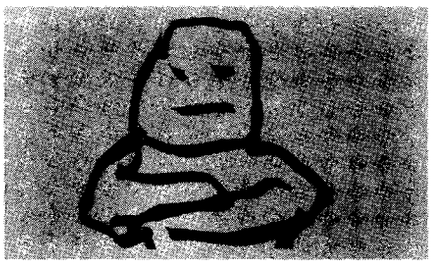
Mystery & meaning

Scheller, Ill.

To the Editors: Philip Hallie ["A Choice of Weapons," October 26] is a good man. His article shows he is sensitive to love and compassion. No one can fault him for learning how to defend himself in his youth and to rescue others, as he did in the Second World War, through the use of violence. In this world of Original Sin, of many different dysfunctions, the violence of World War II on the part of the rescuers seems understandable and reasonable, even though there may have been some amount of self-interest in that crusade.

To Hallie the story of Le Chambon remains an impressive mystery, one that is hard to explain to him since he says he is not much concerned with "the meaning of life." I would guess that "the meaning of life" did enter into the motivation of the people of Le Chambon, their pastor André Trocmé, and his wife Magda.

The old catechism question and answer (now somewhat revised) may have had much to do with their motivation. Why did God make me? "God made me to know God (and to help others to know God), to love God (and to help others to love God), and to serve God (and to help others to serve God), so that all together we may live in happy community with God into eternity."



Obviously, a certain amount of faith and theology enters into this point of view. I do not expect Mr. Hallie and many others in today's world to understand or accept this form of motivation. I do think it could explain why people like my brother, Carl Kabat, would become a missionary priest and has now spent the past fourteen years in American prisons for the cause of justice and peace with nonviolent love. It could also explain the mystery of Le Chambon and the Trocmés. Interestingly, the next article in that same October 26 issue was about the quiet witness of Franz Jaegerstaetter, another mysterious story.

PAUL KABAT

Adolph Schalk, R.I.P.

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: A number of your readers will wish to know of the death of Adolph Schalk, an occasional contributor *Commonweal* and other U.S. journals. St. Louis native and former Chicago i· ident, he died November 12 of cancer a Swiss hospital; for many years he l· lived in a remote mountain-top villa; Indemini, in the Italian-speaking cant· of Switzerland, Ticino.

Schalk's most recent article *Commonweal* ["Champagne for t· Losers," January 12, 1990] discussed Swiss vote on a referendum to abolish army; the article was a follow-up to a ne exclusive prereferendum report publish in June 1989.

Schalk was the author of *A History the German Peoples* and was a freque commentator on topics of general a· Catholic interest on Swiss and German te· vision networks. He also operated an a and crafts shop, "Casa Arlecchino," Indemini.

Schalk, about sixty-seven, was a form· editor of *Today* magazine and one of t· founders of the *Sun Herald* in Kansas Cit· Missouri, a predecessor of the *Nation· Catholic Reporter.* He was active in int racial affairs in St. Louis and, while livi in Chicago, was a Friendship House v· unteer. He leaves no immediate survivo·

NINA POLCYN MOOR

Commonweal, is indexed in Reader's Guide Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Ind. Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Revie Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vo· 1, 1924, to current issues available through Universi· Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 4810· and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooste Ohio 44691. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 001· 3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y and at additional offices. Copyright © 199 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2. Year· subscriptions, U.S., $32; Canada, $34; foreign, $3· Special two-year rate: U.S., $57; Canada, $61; fo· eign, $67. All Canadian and foreign subscriptio· must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Mone· Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover art & design, pp. 17, 23, A· tonucci; cover art, Mitro, Rothco, & Dover Pub.; 2, Charlot; p. 4, Cluff, Rothco; p. 6, Bas, *Tachydr· mos*, Greece; pp. 7, 11, Valerry; p. 15, Corbin; fro· Rothco, p. 21, Baloo; p. 27, Ross; p. 30, Matt.

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COMMONWEAL

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas, New Year's and July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, Me. 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, N.Y. 10038.

Patience and resolve

To war—or not—in the Gulf? If yes, when? and how? If no, what is to be done instead?

As the UN deadline approaches, debate appears to seesaw between a headlong rush to war and a growing opposition to any major American presence in the Gulf. In fact, opinion falls not into two but three broad camps: those advocating quick, decisive action if January 15 passes without an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait; those opposing U.S. Gulf policy, root and branch; and those counseling continued military pressure, including a credible threat to resort to armed force if necessary, combined with reliance on economic sanctions as still the best way to achieve the goals set forth by the United Nations.

Among the no-sayers—a small but growing number of Americans—are the leaders of several Christian denominations (although not the U.S. Catholic bishops) and many religious activists (including quite a few Catholics). Most are not pacifists nor members of the historic pacifist churches, but they feel a bad conscience about whatever in their own theological traditions holds that armed force can sometimes be the moral choice, and they are psychologically resistant to any positive evaluation of the use of armed force. Many reflexively view the projection of American power as an act of imperialism whether under the banner of Pax Americana or "world policeman." Among these are veterans of recent antiwar campaigns who frame their reaction to this nation's Gulf policy in the same terms by which they opposed U.S. interventions in Central America and the Caribbean. For some, the choice between George Bush and Saddam Hussein is a tough call. Others, less denunciatory, nevertheless oppose our government's support for the Kuwaiti and Saudi monarchies. They define the Gulf crisis as an Arab problem to be solved by Arabs, and they urge a virtually total withdrawal of American forces.

To support this opposition to America's Gulf presence, its representatives have appropriated a number of legitimate issues: this country's continued reliance on Gulf oil, its role in aiding the growth of Iraq's military power, its decades-long failure to achieve a balanced U.S. policy in the Middle East. Much in American economic and international policy demands correction and new initiatives (on energy, for example; on arms sales; on an international conference to help stabilize the Middle East; on the strengthening of UN peacekeeping forces and procedures). But these are not grounds for withdrawal. A U.S. pullout would hardly guarantee peace in the region; on the contrary, it would more likely guarantee the continued rule of violence there and elsewhere. It would further isolate Israel—a consequence its leaders sometimes appear perversely to desire but which its people do not deserve. And it is hard to imagine that a success by Saddam Hussein will make either Israelis or Palestinians more amenable to a settlement. A U.S. pullout would not bring democracy or greater social justice to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. It would not assure the

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flow of oil, now so critical to the economies of Central Europe's fledgling democracies and so many nations in the developed and developing worlds. And it would represent a setback for the United Nations and collective peacemaking in a post-cold war world.

But why must a rush to war be the alternative to withdrawal? Why must the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait also set the deadline for war? Why does the White House so insistently repeat the self-fulfilling prophecy that we and our allies lack the patience to sustain an embargo, when this embargo already appears to be the most comprehensive and widely observed in history? The world has everything to gain, and Saddam Hussein much to lose, in giving the sanctions more time to work. No matter how repressive the Iraqi regime may be, it can't overmatch the air and naval power that enforces the embargo. It can't turn its edicts into spare parts for tanks, planes, trucks, or cars, ammunition for target practice, money for oil not sold. If war comes, then, isn't October better than January, not to forget, of course, that never is better than October?

War is hellish, its results unpredictable, its destructiveness in our time beyond imagining. If we think the Security Council was right to go beyond condemnation and an economic embargo and to authorize the use of military force as a *possible* option, it is because we think this can reduce Baghdad's temptation to test sanctions to the bitter end in hopes of outlasting its adversaries' unity or willpower. In the present state of international relations, the war option is needed to make the sanctions option credible. Not wanting to legitimate war, we squirm and we fudge but finally cannot avoid the truth that at least sometimes the threat of it can forestall the reality.

The idea that sanctions or diplomacy unsupported by military pressure can achieve peace in the Gulf is a fantasy calculated to salve uneasy consciences. Those who (like *Commonweal*) urge reliance on sanctions must acknowledge that they accept the possibility of war. That does not mean they accept the possibility of any and every war. As it happens, despite the swift pace of events since August, this is a rare moment in which the criteria for a just war—most often considered after the fact, by detached academics rather than engaged citizens or their servants in office—can be studied as guides to policy. Though there are many unknowns, though there are uncertainties about strategy and tactics, we cannot agree with those who have quickly concluded that a just war could not be waged against Saddam Hussein.

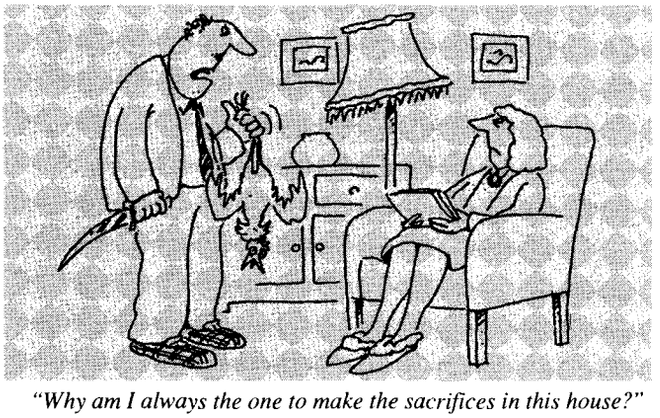
There is sufficient cause: forceful absorption of a sovereign nation and its people by an aggressor who, spurning (thus far) UN resolutions and the global consensus they represent, evades efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution and reveals himself as a menace that can only grow with his increasing possession of chemical, biological, and nuclear weaponry.

Just means to match a just cause are available: targeting technologies could limit air and naval bombardments to military targets and minimize attacks against civilians. We are not imagining the notoriously elusive "surgical" strikes, but between that military will-o'-the-wisp and either carpet bombing or frontal land assault, there are military options that cannot be discounted. They will not spare significant numbers of people, civilians and soldiers, from death or life-altering trauma. The point is that they may spare far more than, in the long run, will a policy of capitulation.

But the question of proportionality between the likely good to be achieved and the evil wrought remains a difficult one. In the fog of battle, especially for a multinational, multicultural force without shared rules of engagement confronting a ruthless enemy, observance of limits and restraints on tactics would be difficult. And there are contingencies difficult to predict. Would Iraq occupy Jordan and then (or simultaneously) attack Israel? Would Israel enter the war? Would Syria then switch sides? Would we end up trading the tyrant of Baghdad for the tyrant of Damascus? Would our other Arab allies be destabilized during a war by the divided sentiments of their own peoples? Against these hard-to-calculate risks must be weighed several hard-to-calculate possibilities: that a successful example of international cooperation against aggression could set a powerful precedent for the post-cold-war era; that the third world and hard-pressed Central European nations could be assured of stable oil prices; that down the road, an international conference could deal with other outstanding Middle East issues.

No war can be considered just that is not declared by a legitimate authority. Many people would consider the United Nations to constitute one. But Americans can rightfully demand that the president obtain some further authorization from Congress if not a full-scale declaration of war before ordering any major military action.

Finally war can be waged only as a last resort. Like notions of a preponderance of evidence or proof beyond reasonable doubt, this is a down-to-earth requirement. To transmute it into theoretical speculation about the one more attempt that can always be made reduces it to a debating point. At this juncture in the Persian Gulf crisis, when sanctions and negotiations backed with threats of military action (and perhaps eventually with the use of force) still have not been played out, we have not reached the point of last resort. A failure of American military power in the Gulf would not be a step on the road to peace. Neither would a failure of diplomatic nerve or confidence in ourselves and like-minded nations to use a powerful economic weapon like the embargo. The uncertainties are great but the stakes are high. That counsels caution, patience, and firmness, not rashness or withdrawal.



"Why am I always the one to make the sacrifices in this house?"

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BRITAIN AFTER THATCHER

WHAT MAGGIE HATH WROUGHT

LABOR WON'T BE THE SAME

Margaret Thatcher was far more popular in the United States than she was in Britain, for both good and bad reasons.

Americans tended to like her because she seemed to like us so relentlessly. Her pro-Americanism was visceral. It was a passion she shared with many in the British lower-middle class and working class, but not with her country's elites. They tend to be skeptical of our commercial brand of egalitarianism. That was just what Thatcher liked about us. She publicly disdained the privileges of old families—though old wealth in fact fared quite well under her regime—and much preferred middle-class strivers like herself. Her pro-Americanism was more than just sentimental or rhetorical. On most issues that mattered, she backed Washington, even when the rest of our European friends had other ideas.

My hunch is that Americans also liked her because they intuitively sensed that she had virtues that our own recent leaders lacked. Like Ronald Reagan, she had convictions, but unlike Reagan, she paid attention to such things as facts and details. In her devotion to the day-to-dayness of government, she shared much with George Bush. But unlike Bush, she had those convictions. Not only would Thatcher never use a phrase like "the vision thing," she would think it preposterous for a visionless leader to expect to lead at all.

Some Americans no doubt admired her for a reason that she would regard as foolish: They liked a tough woman who could make it to the top of British Toryism, which often seems to be a stuffy old private men's club masquerading as a mass political party.

The American Right had special reasons for loving her. She took power a year before Ronald Reagan did, and was, for American conservatives, the John the Baptist of the Reagan Revolution. Between them, Reagan and Thatcher seemed to herald a new international turn to the Right, a turn in favor of unfettered markets and traditional values, and against the welfare state. Although small-c conservatives have always been (rightly) wary of Big Theories about the Big Forces of History, parts of the Anglo-American Right in the 1980s often sounded like historical determinists. They spoke of the ineluctable move toward capitalism and the withering away of the state.

To make this case, conservatives had to put aside a lot of evidence. For example, Reagan and Thatcher owed their victories to the very same sort of economic discontent that also brought François Mitterand and the French Socialists to power in 1981. It was hard to argue for a big international pendulum swing to the Right when France, the country that invented the whole idea of "Left" and "Right," was heading Left.

Still, conservatives were not alone in seeing Thatcher's initial triumph and her endurance in power as historic watersheds. Peter Jenkins, one of Britain's most astute political journalists, gave his excellent book *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution* the subtitle: "The Ending of the Socialist Era." Jenkins, whose sympathies are toward moderate social democracy, argued that Thatcher really did shift the consensus in Britain. Of the new consensus he wrote: "Its assumptions are individualistic rather than collectivist, preferring private to state ownership, putting the rights of the member before the interests of the trade union, and sound money above the priming of the economy." Jenkins went on to note that Thatcher singularly failed to roll back the welfare state. Many have argued that Thatcher survived large-scale unemployment during her time in office only *because* of the system of collective provision that the Labor party put in place after World War II. Still, as Jenkins concluded, "if socialism is taken to be at heart a doctrine concerning production and ownership, it would seem to be pretty effectively dead in Thatcher's Britain."

It could prove to be one of history's ironies that Thatcher's most important long-term impact will be less on her own party than on the Labor opposition. In all of the encomiums to Thatcher in recent weeks, it was often forgotten that her party never received more than 43 percent of the vote, a proportion smaller than Michael Dukakis's and only slightly larger than Walter Mondale's. She won initially because a wave of strikes discredited Labor Prime Minister James Callaghan's corporatist attempts to balance the interests of labor and capital. She was re-elected in 1983 and 1987 because the new alliance between the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party, a centrist breakaway from Labor, took away so many Labor votes.

All this profoundly changed the Labor party. Under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, Labor has accepted, far more than many on its Left would like, Thatcher's notion of an "enterprise society." After four decades of battling internally over whether state ownership of the means of production was the essence of laborism, Kinnock has shelved the argument entirely. Labor now accepts large-scale private ownership—as do virtually all other reformist and social democratic parties. This is a posthumous victory for Anthony Crosland, the Labor politician and intellectual whose 1955 book *The Future of Socialism* argued that socialism was about equality, not about who technically owned this factory or that shipyard. This, in turn means that Labor understands that if it is ever to win power again, it needs to see its own role as the social democratic heretics saw theirs: It is a party that broadly accepts the market system and seeks an approach to economic growth that is mildly but uncompromisingly redistributionist. Thatcher has argued that progress and inequality go hand-in-hand. Labor needs to prove that growth and equity—or, as one of its slogans would have it, Freedom and Fairness—are allies, not enemies. Freedom, in fact, is now a favorite Labor theme. One of its main lines of criticism against Thatcher concerns issues of civil rights and civil liberties, surely a sign of how much Labor's emphasis has shifted toward individualism. In helping to make Labor a modern reformist party,

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Thatcher has done her country a great service, though one suspects it is not the one she set out to perform.

While she was doing this, Thatcher lost control of her own party. The precipitating events in her fall had to do with her uneasiness about fully integrating Britain into the European Community and its new monetary system. Part of her reluctance grew from a gut-level nationalism (or, if you prefer, patriotism). But she also understood clearly that the New Europe now being created will have a strongly social democratic cast. Thatcher really was worried that after all her efforts to dismantle the state in Britain, state social regulation would be reimposed from the Community's headquarters in Brussels.

Many conservatives who shared some of Thatcher's worries nonetheless viewed her position as dangerous. For Britain, they argued, there could be no salvation in the long term outside of Europe. Sir Geoffrey Howe, whose loyalty to Thatcher made him the object of some derision, precipitated her collapse by making the case against her position on Europe in a remarkably tough and quietly angry speech in Parliament. This gave Thatcher's arch-foe Michael Hesseltine no choice but to stand against her.

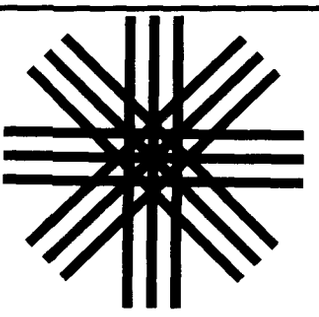
Hesseltine held Thatcher a few votes short of the number of votes she needed for re-election as party leader. After some hesitation, Thatcher allowed shrewdness to triumph over stubbornness. She dropped out, threw her support to John Major, whom she had been grooming as a possible successor, and Major, the Thatcherite of modest origins, routed the more liberal Hesseltine and the more aristocratic Douglas Hurd. (Poor Hurd complained that his class background was mentioned so often as a handicap that one would imagine that he was seeking the leadership of a Marxist party, not the Tories. Conservative class consciousness is one of the curious achievements of Thatcherism.)

Despite the European issue's role in the final act of Thatcher's collapse, its importance has been exaggerated. What really destroyed Thatcher is a classic bit of right-wing overreaching, the so-called "poll tax." Essentially, Thatcher replaced the property tax that had financed local government with a head-tax that was the same for rich and poor alike. This large-scale shift of the tax burden to the less well-off was designed to create stronger taxpayer pressure on local Labor governments to hold expenditures down. (If everyone was taxed roughly the same, everyone would have an equal interest in holding down taxes.) Nothing could have played better into Labor's fairness theme. Thatcher's mistake was closely akin to George Bush's error in proposing cuts in the capital gains tax along with increases in regressive taxes on cigarettes, alcohol, and gasoline. The lesson is clear: The great conservative revolution of the 1980s had strictly defined limits. In the end, average voters still have certain egalitarian instincts. At a minimum, they think the wealthy ought to pay higher taxes than they do. Ironically, the tax issue, which proved so important to the rise of the Right, may ultimately be the Right's downfall, both here and in Britain.

Prime Minister Major—it does sound odd, doesn't it?—will face a fundamental problem: He is Thatcher's choice, but he is not Thatcher. This means that he could inherit some of Thatcher's liabilities, but lack her public image of gritty determination. He is trying hard to prove that his administration will be Major I, not Thatcher II, and he wisely brought Hesseltine into the cabinet with the explicit tack of redoing the poll tax.

The British, whose economy is suffering and whose people seem to want a dose of reformist egalitarianism again, seem quite ready to move beyond the Thatcher era—even if they will also hold onto some of its lessons. If Thatcher's rise meant "the ending of the Socialist Era," as Peter Jenkins suggested, her fall probably means the end of heroic conservatism. Politics in the West is back to normal. E.J. DIONNE, JR.

E.J. Dionne, Jr., a reporter for the Washington Post, *has contributed essays on politics to* Commonweal *since 1978. His book,* Why Americans Hate Politics, *will be published this spring by Simon & Schuster.*



THE GRAYMOOR PRIZE

COMMONWEAL and the Friars of the Atonement are pleased to announce the first winner of the Graymoor Prize for an essay on ecumenism. In the spirit of ecumenism, we are happy furthermore to recognize a diversity of excellence by awarding the prize to two essayists, Mr. John Ginger of Beckford, England, and Mr. Ed Marciniak of Chicago. The essays will be published in our Contemporary Theology issue, January 25. Mr. Ginger is a writer and a lecturer on English literature. Mr. Marciniak is president of the Institute of Urban Life and adjunct professor of urban studies at Loyola University, Chicago. The $1,000 prize money has been divided between the two winners. We thank both gentlemen for graciously acceding to this Solomon-like necessity. No one ever said ecumenism would be easy.

COMMONWEAL received sixty-five submissions for the prize. From this abundance of argument and testimony, five finalists were selected and discussed at length. Indeed, we think several of the other finalists deserve publication, and hope to pursue that possibility with the authors as editorial and space considerations allow.

We would especially like to thank the Friars of the Atonement for sponsoring the essay contest, which had the important goal of encouraging new ecumenical ideas and perspectives. We are confident our readers will benefit from the friars' generosity.

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OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

TRAVELING LITE

THE EMPTY-BIN GENERATION

As I think I have mentioned in this space before, I earn my living teaching sociology at a community college. Every so often a perverse mood comes over me, and I point out to my students that Julius Caesar, despite having spent a certain amount of time in Britain, could not speak a single word of English. He didn't even know how to say, "Have a nice day." How could this be? How could so intelligent a man have been so linguistically ignorant? It takes about five minutes of wrong guesses before someone suggests that Caesar may have antedated the English language.

Of course my students know the basics of U.S. history: that Washington was the first president; that Lincoln presided over the Civil War; that John Kennedy had a relationship with Marilyn Monroe.

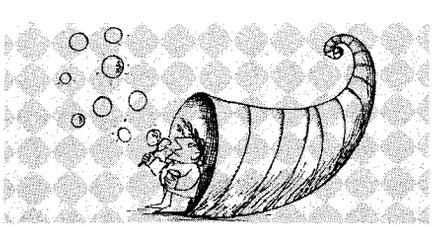
The other day one of my colleagues made the mistake of asking his class what the expression "A.D." stands for, as in the sentence, "The Emperor Diocletian decreed price controls in A.D. 301." No one knew the answer—though several students suggested "after death," perhaps on the theory that dead folks, whose income after all is notoriously stable, would stand more in need of price controls than those of us with greater potential for income growth.

Based on what I've read and experienced, it seems that my students constitute something close to a representative sample of the nation's college students. Maybe the typical four-year student knows a little more history than my two-year students, but not much more. My students may be drowning in 100 fathoms of historical ignorance, while the others are drowning in only 97 fathoms; but they are all drowning.

Gallup polls on religion consistently reveal that America has a higher rate of religiosity than any other advanced industrial nation. Could this be the clue to the ahistorical nature of the undergraduate mind? Could it be that a sense of religion has left no mental room for a sense of history? Religion, after all, is concerned with eternity, not time; with the realm of spirit, not the realm of earthly things. The development of the modern sense of history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be seen as part and parcel of the Enlightenment's antireligious program: earth was to be substituted for heaven, mankind for God, time for eternity, and history for theology. But the average American has never subscribed to this program. We never gave up on the idea of God, so we never had to embrace the idea of history. Thus undergraduate ignorance of history may simply be a by-product of the fundamentally religious orientation of the American mind.

Well, this exculpatory theory won't wash. For one thing, when we talk about religion in America we are not talking about religion in general but about Christianity, which in one or another of its many forms is the religion of the great bulk of the population. But Christianity is a historical religion. Whatever the case may be for Hindus, for example, for Christians a sense of history is not in the least incompatible with a sense of religion. On the contrary, a sense of history is indispensable for a properly Christian sense of religion.

For another, if undergraduates are uninformed about history, they are nearly equally uninformed about religion. Were the mind of the average collegian stocked with an overflowing supply of religious knowledge, something might be said for the theory that there is no room left for any historical knowledge. But the mental bins in which students store their religious knowledge are almost as empty as the bins in which they store their historical knowledge.



At the level of religious professionals, the ecumenism of the last generation or so has led to greater understanding and appreciation of the other fellow's religion. But at the level of the typical college student almost none of this has taken place. Reduced hostility among faiths has led to nothing better than greater indifference. In the bad old pre-ecumenical days our views of other religions may have been distorted by vicious stereotypes, but at least we had views. Perhaps young Catholics were taught that Martin Luther initiated the Reformation because he wanted to marry a nun and drink beer; that he slandered the Holy Father in a sacrilegious manner; and that he told people they could sin freely provided they had faith. This wasn't fair to Luther, but at least it contained a set of half-truths; and the person fed these half-truths may have been better off than the one who responds to the mention of Luther's name by saying, "Martin *who*?"

Corresponding to this drop-off in knowledge of other religions has been a decline among the young of knowledge of their own religion. As doctrinal differences between faiths diminish in social importance, it becomes less important to know the doctrines of one's own faith.

So we are raising a generation that knows little religion and less history. To those of us who belong to the older world this looks like a cultural catastrophe. We don't understand how someone can get oriented to the universe without a sense of history or religion or both.

But perhaps there is a bright side to all this. Perhaps a new kind of human being is emerging—one who doesn't know where he or she is in the great ocean of being or in the rushing river of time; and doesn't care; and does very nicely, thank you, despite neither knowing nor caring. My students travel light, keeping their minds free for their daily practical tasks, while we old-fashioned folk weigh ourselves down by carrying hundred-pound metaphysical backpacks, filled with curious but useless items of information. Oh brave new world, that has such students in it!

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OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

MENDING CATHOLIC MANNERS

LONGING FOR A MORE CIVIL CHURCH

It is an old book with faded red and dog-eared covers. In the years it has been on one or the other of my shelves—ever since my days in graduate school—its pages have yellowed and the binding has loosened. I went looking for it after mulling over the letters, editorials, and articles in the December 7 *Commonweal*.

My field was seventeenth-century English literature and the book is an anthology of English prose from 1600 to 1660. I wanted to see if the spirit of civility and charity was reflected in that prose as I remembered it.

My interest was triggered particularly by the quotations from John Cardinal Newman and Evelyn Waugh in Vernon Ruland's article, "Vouching for Fidelity," on the Vatican loyalty oath. Waugh spoke of the Anglican church contemptuously as a church whose mind "is not made up," and Newman said, "there are two alternatives, the way to Rome and the way to atheism. Anglicanism is the half-way house on the one side, and liberalism is the halfway house on the other." Ruland says he respects these "white-hot" convictions but asks "what is so contemptible about a spiritual halfway house? The distaste expressed...for compromise and provisional religious insight goes too far. It smacks of a neurotic hankering for absolutes...."

I agree. In studying the seventeenth century I first encountered the idea of the *via media*, the phrase then beginning to be used as a description of the Anglican (or Episcopal) church as the middle ground between the uncompromising absolutes of Rome and the narrowly rigorous tenets of Protestant fundamentalism. After the bloody religious differences of the period from Henry VIII to James I, seventeenth-century Anglicans were beginning to define themselves in just such terms. I found the concept of the *via media* attractive then and I find it attractive now.

The most persuasive and peaceable of these Anglican writers was Sir Thomas Browne, who refused to reject completely everything having to do with the "old religion": "We have reformed from them, not against them....I am not scrupulous to converse and live with them, to enter their churches in defect of ours, and either pray with them, or for them....At the sight of a cross or a crucifix I can dispense with my hat but scarce with the thought of memory of my Savior....I could never hear the Ave-Mary bells without an elevation; or think it sufficient warrant, because they erred in one circumstance, for me to err in all, that is in silence and dumb contempt."

Thomas Browne also refused to attack the pope although he felt that the pope had attacked him: "It is as uncharitable a point in us to fall upon those popular scurrilities and approbrious scoffs of the bishop of Rome to whom...we owe the duty of good language. I confess there is a cause of passion between us: by his sentence I stand excommunicated; *heretic* is the best language he affords me; yet can no ear witness I ever returned him the name of *Antichrist, Man of Sin,* or *Whore of Babylon*." The faith of wise believers, he added, "can sustain itself upon a temperate dispute."

This reasonableness was shared to an extent by King James I when he was head of the Church of England. According to popular preacher Thomas Fuller, who was also a very anecdotal church historian, after his accession, James responded to the importunities of the Scottish Presbyterians or Nonconformists, who wanted to urge the adoption of their form of church government, by calling a conference instead of simply suppressing them. After the conference, says Fuller, "whereas it was hitherto disputable whether the North, where he had long lived, or the South, whether he lately came, should prevail most on the king's judgment in church government, this doubt was now clearly decided." Fuller, who was known for his wry humor, adds, "henceforth...such who knew not their own till they knew the king's mind in this matter...quietly digested the ceremonies of the church."

Perhaps it takes centuries to develop the spirit of reasonableness and charity in the handling of religious differences. From those uncertain beginnings of tolerance in the seventeenth century a real *via media* has developed in which laity and clergy are comfortable with each other. One cannot conceive in that halfway house of a bullying insistence on abject loyalty and submission to the pronouncements (even unknown future pronouncements!) of the church's rulers. One cannot conceive of the clergy as a caste apart.

The troubles in our Roman Catholic church stem, it seems clear, in part from the fact that the apartness of the clergy creates a lack of civility and charity. Whether incivility, immaturity, and arbitrariness stem from the way the individual is "programmed" by religious life and the priesthood, as Dennis Geaney, O.S.A., suggests in the correspondence section of the same issue of *Commonweal*, or whether it results from the "depressing rectory culture," as Richard Mazziotta, C.S.C., proposes, it is certain that the relationship to other members of the church is not a normal one.

Nor is the relationship of those in power in Rome to their so-called subjects—witness the insulting prohibition of an honor to a loyal and brilliant churchman like Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Or consider the editorial in that same issue: To those lay people who have given time and energy and add special talents and expertise to various church bodies, only to find that "bishops and clergy still hold the real power and that many hoard it jealously."

It is not so much the authority one questions in the Roman Catholic church as the lack of the qualities of good leadership, including respect for the persons involved, the efforts at persuasion, and the explanations to which associates and subordinates are entitled—in fact, the lack of ordinary good manners.

Can we not find a way to a *via media* of our own?

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THE 'KARATE KID' MEETS THE SHINING PATH

STRUGGLING TO SAVE PERU

TOM VOGEL, JR.

Enigmatic. Stern. Inarticulate. Terse. Alone. All these terms fit Alberto Fujimori, a fifty-two-year-old agronomist and son of Japanese immigrants, who last spring surprised Peru by becoming its president, defeating the heavily favored novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. Another word for Fujimori might be "beleaguered," though it describes his situation rather than his personality. The challenges he faces include an economy in shambles, endemic poverty, isolation from the international financial community, cruel violence mounted by the Shining Path guerrillas, a military of questionable loyalty with low regard for human rights, and pressures from the United States to adopt a more repressive antidrug policy. Thus far, his efforts to cope with this dismaying agenda have brought some success on the inflation front but little or no diminution of political violence; his program has alienated some constituencies and imposed new levels of suffering on the poor.

The outcome of Fujimori's campaign was an astonishment. He ran on a shoestring budget that was dwarfed by Vargas Lllosa's multimillion-dollar war chest. Until a week before the first round of the presidential elections on April 8, he was a virtual unknown outside academia (he was once dean of Peru's Agrarian University); his opponent was famous even outside Peru. And, though Fujimori is a Catholic and Vargas Llosa an atheist, powerful members of the church hierarchy openly favored the novelist, this out of the perceived danger to the church of Fujimori's electoral alliance with Peru's National Evangelical Council, representing some seventy-seven evangelical groups.

Fujimori won the confidence of voters with his slogan, "Honesty, Technology, and Work," helped by the perception of Vargas Llosa as backed by high-powered conservatives. According to several church experts, the evangelical threat to the Catholic church was exaggerated and the unusual involvement of some church figures in the campaign only confused and angered the majority of Catholics, who voted for Fujimori anyway.

Unlike his predecessor, Alan Garcia, who was given to making impromptu speeches from the balcony of the presidential palace that attracted thousands in the early and more popular years of his term, Fujimori limits his communications to official pronouncements at planned events. He reads in staccato bursts from prepared texts while shaking his finger, and rarely extemporizes. In contrast to Garcia and the sophisticated Vargas Llosa, his language is unadorned, his style laconic. But his actions as president have earned him the title "Karate Kid" for his swift and pugnacious approach to the problems that beset the country.

In the process he has made it clear that he has few binding allegiances. He sacked several high-ranking police, army, and navy officers for coup-mongering and corruption when he took office July 28. He has called for the elimination of "lazy bureaucrats who spend their time reading newspapers and doing crossword puzzles." He has criticized Peru's congress for being "sterile." He has taken on labor unions by threatening to fire workers out on strike. He has rankled the church's hierarchy with a program to provide artificial birth control devices below cost to anyone who wants them. He has even alienated his own political party, Cambio 90 (Change 90), by breaking his campaign promises not to apply an economic shock program.

Despite all this, Fujimori enjoys a 59 percent approval rate, according to a poll released in early November. Some believe Fujimori's shrewd choice of right-wing economist Juan Hurtado Miller as his first minister and his association with Hernando de Soto as an adviser for Peru's negotiations with the United States on antidrug policy and discussions on foreign debt are the telling factors. Hurtado Miller currently enjoys a 95 percent approval rate from Peru's top businessmen. Hernando de Soto is well-thought of both within Peru and abroad for his book *The Other Path* on Peru's informal economy and his work at the innovative economic and political think-tank Institute of Liberty and Democracy (ILD).

Economist Alejandro Toledo explains that "the vote for Fujimori was a vote of protest...for a country in the process of social metamorphosis...and looking for a new type of politician." Because he is the son of immigrants and a political outsider, Peru's poor majority believe Fujimori won't forget them as traditional power brokers have always done before.

Though the economic shock program is more brutal than even

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what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would have advised, most Peruvians think that it is necessary to bring Peru's runaway inflation, pegged at 7,864 percent for the twelve months previous to November 9, under control. What is ironic, says Toledo, "is that if Vargas Llosa had instituted the same program, this whole country would be Shining Path now."

Thus far Fujimori seems to be succeeding at the macroeconomic level with inflation down to 5.9 percent a month for November—it had averaged over 40 percent monthly since January of 1990—and progress with international lenders such as the IMF and the World Bank in paying off some of Peru's staggering $2 billion in arrears out of a total foreign debt of over $20 billion. But the "Karate Kid" has done little about Peru's two other major challenges: poverty and political violence.

The depth and extent of Peruvian poverty become vivid for a visitor to San Juan de Lurigancho, a huge shantytown fifteen kilometers from the center of Lima. With a population of one million people, many of them refugees from Shining Path violence and military repression in the Andes, Lurigancho has one paved road and no garbage collection or sewage services to speak of. The dusty streets are bursting with children, dogs, and smoke-belching buses. Many neighborhood streets are amazingly free of litter. But homes stand with parts of the first or second floor uncompleted. Mothers with children in tow wander about in old and ill-fitting clothing. More than 80 percent of Lurigancho's residents rely on the government's Social Emergency Program (PES) for one meal a day.

In a Lurigancho soup kitchen run by the Mothers' Club, an organization formed by shantytown mothers in the early 1980s, Betty, the local Mothers' Club coordinator, guts fish in preparation for the day's meal. The soup kitchen serves more than 150 people a day, but Betty says the government provides only enough money to feed a quarter of them at forty cents per ration; the remainder must come from the community. "This government," Betty complains, "has done a pantomime of a social emergency program. I want to know where all the money is going."

PES was programmed to feed 7 million Peruvians in extreme poverty through December with a fund of $415 million. About a quarter of this fund was to come from aid programs already in place, such as Caritas. Another quarter was to come from other nations, and the remainder, $215 million, from the Peruvian government. By early December, only $132 million in aid had come through, while the number of Peruvians in extreme poverty had increased to nearly 13 million, thanks to the economic shock program.

International donations never materialized because of a lack of confidence in the Peruvian government's ability to channel the funds, says Mario Rios, general secretary of Caritas in Peru. Of the $215 million the Peruvian government had promised, only $32 million ever materialized, according to economist Alejandro Toledo, even though Peru's international reserves were estimated to be over $700 million at the end of November. Visiting World Bank experts criticized the government's "incapacity" to run PES and suggested that an autonomous fund be created to make distribution more efficient and gain the confidence of potential foreign donors.

Toledo says the poor have survived thus far on dollars ferreted away in cookie jars or under mattresses but come February this economic cushion will be exhausted. Fujimori, he warns, "is playing with fire. The shock was necessary to begin a return to economic stability, but the social costs are unevenly distributed." Even before the economic shock, according to another expert, more than seventy thousand children died in Peru each year before reaching their twelfth birthdays, most from malnutrition or easily preventable illnesses.

Apart from maldistribution of aid, the program has hurt the poor through dramatic price increases for telephone service and electricity and a heavy tax on gasoline. Before August 8, those who earned a minimum wage (less than $50 a month in November) were spending 64 percent of their income on food; now they are spending more than 86 percent, according to Toledo. And most of Peru's poor are unemployed and thus receive much less than the minimum wage. Toledo contends that true economic recovery will be impossible without creating jobs for poor Peruvians; yet, PES-funded work programs have not materialized either. The whole emergency aid program is scheduled to end by January and at this writing no plans to renew it have been announced. Rios says that Caritas had already run out of funds for many areas by the first week of December.

The violence of Peru is even more dismaying, if that is possible, than its poverty. According to one human rights activist, nearly a thousand Peruvians died because of political violence in the first three months of the Fujimori government. More than half were *campesinos* but police officers, soldiers, businessmen, a judge, and farmers were also victimized. In all of 1989, there were 2,919 deaths from political violence; since 1980, when the Shining Path (SP), Peru's principal human rights violator, took up arms, the number of victims is put at 18,743.

From 1987-1989, Peru occupied first place in the world for detained and disappeared people, according to United Nations compilations. More than 300 were detained and "disappeared" by security and terrorist groups in 1989; through July of 1990, the number was 144. Peru and Colombia accounted for 70 percent of the world's total number of detained and disappeared people last year. Economic damage caused by ten years of political violence exceeds $17 billion, nearly equal to Peru's foreign debt.

Peru has lacked a coherent counter-subversion strategy since the Shining Path insurrection began, ever since a smaller group, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), followed suit in the mid-1980s. The lack of strategy has led to confusion on a grand scale and the attendant human rights violations. One specialist on the issue said that the Peruvian military does "sloppy detective work and has little intelligence" and spends less time protecting the population from SP than trying to protect itself. A leading Peruvian journalist, Mariela Balbi, blames Fujimori: "The worst thing [he] is doing is not paying any attention to the antisubversion battle...he is closing his eyes to reality."

In mid-October 1989, two fruit pickers, I shall call them "Juan"

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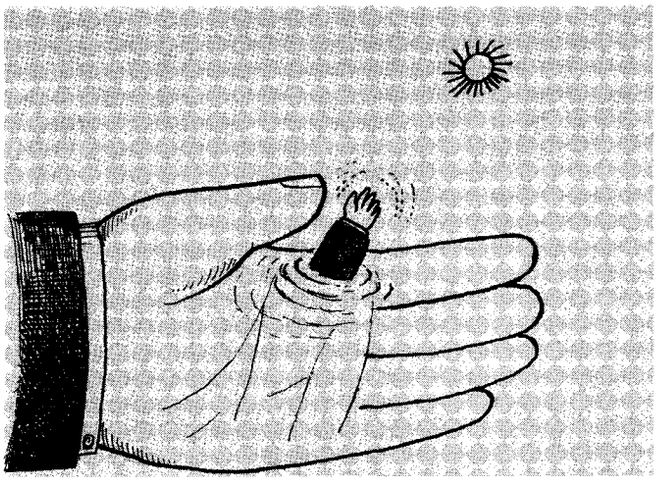

and "Alberto," were rowing their canoe through a marsh area outside the jungle town Pucallpa, more than 400 kilometers northeast of Lima, when they saw a military helicopter fly overhead and hover nearby. They heard splashes as if something were being dropped into the water; some of the splashes were followed by explosions.

"Juan" and "Alberto," curious, rowed over to take a look. They found the body of a thirty-year-old man, hands and legs bound, with no identification documents. There was a bullet hole in his head and his body showed signs of torture. The fruit pickers found five other bodies nearby; some had been destroyed with dynamite charges.

Terrified, the two men fled the marsh and soon after reported what they had seen to the bishop of Pucallpa, Monseñor Juan Luis Martin Buisson. Buisson, who says he has received thirty reports of disappearances in the past three months in the area around Pucallpa, decided to conduct an investigation through the Episcopal Social Action Commission (CEAS), a church-sponsored human rights group. CEAS investigators returned to the site a week later and took photos of eleven bodies in varying stages of decomposition. The military commander in Pucallpa promised an immediate investigation; more than a month later, he has yet to issue a report.

In the small jungle town of La Florida, more than 200 kilometers east of Lima, Mother Augustina Rios Lopez, seventy, was making lemon candies for local children on the morning of September 27 when a sixteen-year-old girl, a Shining Path terrorist armed with an automatic weapon, burst into her room at the center house for the Good Shepherd Congregation and ordered her to a meeting in the town's central plaza. Mother Augustina had endured long Shining Path lectures on their complex Marxist-Maoist ideologies before and took her time in coming by.

When she arrived at the plaza Mother Augustina was pushed against a wall with six other people from the area and told that she would be punished for delaying. A list of charges against the nun were read off. She was accused of helping distribute emergency food, diverting *campesinos* from the "revolution," working with jungle natives hostile to Shining Path, speaking of peace, distracting children with candies, and cooperating with the local agency of the state development corporation.

The terrorists shot and killed, one by one, each of the six others. Each time Mother Augustina begged for their lives. When her turn came they ordered her to kneel but, being old, she stumbled a bit in doing so. The sixteen-year-old terrorist ran over and shouted: "Now we are killing you. Tomorrow we will kill your god. Now let's see who you are going to save." Then she shot Mother Augustina in the head.

Gustavo Gorritti, Peru's best-known expert on the Shining Path, says that "the [religious] habit affords a bit of protection as long as they [the clergy] do not work directly against SP." He does not believe the guerrillas have a systematic strategy to attack the church. But Pablo Rojas, president of the Human Rights Commission, disagrees. He says the Mother Augustina killing, the second officially confirmed murder of a religious by Shining Path, is highly significant. "The church is the only infrastructure left in many areas of Peru," says Rojas. SP has been threatening missionaries in conflictive zones of Peru for years, he says, but the church has been slow to report these incidents. The rest of Mother Augustina's order abandoned the mission in La Florida immediately after her murder.

Though Fujimori has said on many occasions how important it is to defend human rights, his contemporaries in the government and the armed forces are sending a different message altogether. "New legislation for prosecuting terrorists will help expedite trials and also help to prevent human rights organizations from obstructing the activities of the police and armed forces in the affected zones," says Peru's minister of justice, Augusto Antonioli. In a speech at a forum on human rights in November, Brigadier General Alberto Arciniega said that human rights groups were being used by the terrorists to sow discontent and insecurity in the armed forces through investigations into reports of violations.

Like the *campesinos* of the Peruvian Andes, human rights groups have been getting it from both sides. In February and March of 1990, shortly after Peruvian activists participated in a United Nations session on human rights, a number of human rights workers in Peru were threatened with death, one was kidnapped and never seen again, and organization offices, including that of Amnesty International in Lima, were bombed. Right-wing paramilitary groups were blamed for the attacks. At least one human rights group has been threatened by Shining Path for denouncing human rights violations perpetrated by the terrorists.

Despite his criticisms, Alejandro Toledo has hope for the president—for an unusual reason. "Alberto Fujimori is destined to succeed," he says, "because there is no room for failure.... Peruvians have their backs against the wall." Another cryptic message is offered by the acclaimed Peruvian film *Caidos del Cielo* ("Fallen from Heaven"), directed by Francisco Lombardi. Its main character, host of a radio talk show, offers desperate callers calming advice to keep fighting in life, never to lose their sense of dignity and hope. He ends each program by reminding listeners that, in the end, "you are your destiny." But, in the film's shattering finale, he fails to dissuade a young woman from throwing herself off a cliff. The film seems to ask, "Peru, what is your destiny?"

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DIVIDED, WE STAND...STILL

THE POLITICAL DEADLOCK IN WASHINGTON

FRED SIEGEL

The United States has, for all practical purposes, become a parliamentary rather than a presidential democracy in the conduct of foreign affairs. This parliamentary turn has its roots in the Vietnam era, when the Watergate affair was, in effect, the means by which a Democratic Congress brought an end to what had become a Republican president's war in Southeast Asia. The same fault lines reappeared in Reagan's second term when Iran-*contra* became the means by which the Democratic Speaker of the House, Jim Wright, took over the conduct of foreign affairs in Central America without formally deposing the Republican president. The same breach has now reappeared over the conduct of policy in the Persian Gulf.

Even before the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait, President George Bush, himself implicated in Iran-*contra*, was engaged in an almost continuous constitutional combat with the Congress over the conduct of foreign policy. Bush, arguing that Congress has breached the constitutional separation of powers by trying to micromanage foreign affairs, has repeatedly reasserted executive prerogative to little effect. He has vetoed Democratic-sponsored bills that would have legislated protections for Chinese students, specified the terms of negotiations with Japan over the FS-X fighter, and prohibited members of the executive from soliciting funds from foreign governments. The last an echo of Iran-*contra* itself.

The current debate over the Persian Gulf has tapped a rich vein of hypocrisy on both sides of the aisle. During the Souter Supreme Court confirmation hearings, the Bush administration made a great show of insisting on judges who adhere to the "original intent" of the Constitution, but now it insists that foreign policy is an exception. While article 1, section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress the exclusive right to "declare war," the Bush people note that that language is far weaker than the draft version that had given Congress the power to "make" war. From this they unreasonably conclude that Congress need not be consulted to initiate even large-scale hostilities.

If Bush's problem is a push for power without legitimate authority, the Congress suffers from a reach for power without accountability. Liberal congressmen who mocked earlier calls for "original intent" on issues like abortion and capital punishment are now waving article 1, section 8 about as if it were a talisman. But rather than exercise their responsibility to call Congress into session to fully debate the issue of war or peace, the congressional leadership, in effect, has undermined Bush's bargaining position with the Iraqis without taking responsibility for the consequences.

This self-destructive deadlock, however, is not confined to foreign policy. The deficit is a product of a politics in which Republican presidents refuse to raise taxes and Democratic Congresses refuse to cut spending. The deadlocks in both domestic and foreign policy demonstrate that the parties are no longer capable of conjoining the separate branches of government. The Constitution was the product of a moral Newtonianism that sought to hold power in place by counterbalancing one political force against another in much the same manner that opposing physical forces kept the planets on a steady path. Strong parties, whatever their faults, assured the informal means of partially overriding constitutionally divided power in order to ensure effective government. But now party government has been undermined by the decline in party loyalty, a decline that has led to the current stalemates in domestic and foreign policy.

The late Richard J. Daley, for better or worse one of the very symbols of the Democratic party, once presided over a self-consciously Democratic electorate in Chicago in which party loyalty was part and parcel of personal identity. But his son, Chicago's current mayor, Richie Daley, recently explained: "I don't think anyone really cares if there is a donkey or an elephant next to somebody's name." He is largely correct; outside of the party professionals and the interest activists who use the parties as vehicles for their causes, only a quarter of the electorate has a strong sense of party affiliation. The absence of strong ties produces ticket-splitting, voting for one party, say, for Congress and another for president. That in turn produces our divided and ineffective government.

Government in America was party government until the 1956 election, when Eisenhower became the first president in American history not to carry in with his election a congressional majority. In 1944 voters in only 8 percent of the congressional districts split their vote; by 1956 it was 30 percent; by 1988 it was nearly half the districts, as each successive generation became less and

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less loyal to a party. This has left the Democrats in seemingly permanent control of the Congress while the Republicans hold a lock on the presidency. Ticket-splitting has created a kind of dual sovereignty in which the primary political struggles are less electoral than administrative and branch fights for competitive advantage.

The Republicans' popular vote lead over the Democrats for the last six presidential elections is 53-43, a margin unequaled since the New Deal. And like the 1930s, the 1980s stand out as a period of unusual generational shifts. In 1980 the split among 18-29 year olds was 54-33 Democratic; by 1989 it was 52-38 Republican, an astounding swing of 35 points. Yet beginning in 1982 the Democrats have gone from being eight Senate seats down to being ten seats up after the 1990 midterm elections.

In addition to ticket-splitting, part of what explains the Republicans' presidential success and parliamentary failure is that the young voters crucial to GOP success in presidential years simply don't turn out for the midterm elections. Due, in part, to this low turnout among young voters tending toward Republicans, the 1990 midterm electorate was the oldest in history.

Barring any cataclysms, the current stalemate is likely to be with us for a long time to come. There is little chance of the Republicans coming to power in the House. When the 1980s began with Ronald Reagan's victory over Jimmy Carter, the Republicans were filled with realignment dreams, hoping to encourage conservative Southern Democrats to switch parties. Many of them did switch, but the 1990 Democrats saw numerous Republican switchers defeated, most notably Congressman Bill Grant in northern Florida. Grant's loss—he represented a rapidly growing Sunbelt area crucial to Republicans—was a crushing blow. The House now seems almost permanently out of the Republicans' reach. To win the House in 1992, Republicans would have to capture an almost unprecedented fifty-one seats. Yet in the wake of Watergate, Democrats were able to capture only forty-seven seats.

Worse yet for the Republicans, despite a decade of GOP presidents, the state legislatures in charge of redrawing the congressional district boundaries for the 1990s are still firmly in Democratic hands. The Democrats have overall control in 19 states with 167 districts (38 percent of the seats); Republicans dominate only two states with 5 seats (1.1 percent).

The Republicans will probably be able to save some of their seats from creative gerrymanderers by making a bargain with African-American legislators to carve up liberal Democratic seats so as to create more black and more Republican districts. But the overall picture is captured by a despairing Republican consultant who moaned that "the Democrats will control the Congress well into the twenty-first century."

But if the Republicans' prospects in Congress are grim, the Democrats' chance of restoring effective government by capturing the presidency, though better, are still not good. By this time in 1986 Democratic presidential hopefuls like Dick Gephardt and Bruce Babbitt were marching through the meeting halls of Iowa and New Hampshire in search of voters. This time no one has thrown his or her hat into the ring. The presidential wing of the Democratic party has never fully recovered from the disastrous divisions of 1968 and 1972 when Humphrey and then McGovern were the standard bearers. Barring a calamity in the Gulf or a prolonged and severe recession, the complex set of presidential primary rules first put in place for the 1972 race and modified repeatedly thereafter are likely to make it very difficult for the Democrats to unify early on behind a single candidate.

Faced with an ongoing stalemate, there is talk of both parties changing the rules. In the late 1940s, a Republican Congress still chafing from FDR's successes and faced with a Democratic lock on the chief executive slot, proposed and succeeded in ratifying the Twenty-second Amendment that limited the presidency to two terms. Now with the tables turned, White House Republicans think they have a winner in calling for congressional term limitations.

In 1990, referenda in California, Colorado, and Oklahoma approved term limitations for the state legislatures. In fact term limitations were so appealing in California that they helped win the governorship for a nondescript candidate, Senator Pete Wilson. But term limitations on Congress are another matter. It's hard to see how they could be imposed by ordinary legislation. The Constitution gives the Congress the right to set its own standards for membership and the Democrats who control Congress, not to mention Republican incumbents, are not going to vote against themselves. State referenda or legislation setting congressional terms would likely be overturned in the courts.

Bush, however, emboldened by public opinion polls that show widespread hostility to what now seems to be "the permanent Congress," has proposed to circumvent those difficulties with a constitutional amendment imposing term limitations. In what is effectively a reprise of his 1988 campaign tactic of calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's flag-burning decision, Bush has at one and the same time put himself on the popular side of an issue and placed his congressional critics in a potentially awkward position. And in the fight over the Persian Gulf for hearts and minds, Bush has, in effect, challenged Congress's claim to truly represent public opinion.

In what is a far less well-known development, some liberal Democrats are looking at the possibility of changing the rules for the electoral college. They want to switch to proportional voting so that a losing candidate would win electors in proportion to his or her total vote. This is a system that's wreaked havoc on the Democrats, however, ever since the McGovern reform introduced it into the party's primary process. The argument for a proportional as opposed to winner-take-all system for each state's electoral vote is that it provides a fairer representation of the state's sentiment. But in the case of a significant third-party vote, as in 1968 with George Wallace or 1980 with John Anderson, it also raises the possibility of political instability if no one gets an electoral majority and the election is thrown into the House of Representatives.

Technical changes can make a difference. It was a change in the political rules that brought France out of the febrile Fifth

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Republic of the 1950s, with its constant changes of government, into the present far more stable presidential system. But America's political problems are far more than technical. In a culture where we insist on choice in everything from supermarket cereals to the sex of unborn infants, it's unlikely we will ever return to the "brand-name loyalty" which rooted our politics in ongoing party commitments. The prognosis is for continuing stalemate. □

THE ORDINARINESS OF GOD

AN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

DANIEL J. O'HANLON

About fifteen years ago, during a sabbatical year, I spent thirteen months in India and the major Buddhist countries, in an effort to deepen my own Christian life through direct contact and involvement with Hindu and Buddhist spirituality. I found the time enormously stimulating, and it was not too difficult to enrich my own life, especially, though certainly not exclusively, the life of prayer, through the experience. I lived in monasteries and ashrams, spending time with wise and holy teachers, and participated in sessions, meditation courses, and various kinds of "retreats," including time spent in Christian ashrams like Bede Griffiths's Shantivanam in South India and Enomiya Lassalle's Christian Zen Center in the mountains outside Tokyo.

Two years ago the sabbatical came round once again and I decided to embark on a similar project. Once again, I wanted to see how Christian spirituality, above all in my own life, could be enriched by direct contact with and participation in the spiritual life of another tradition, this time, Africa. I found this a much more difficult task than the earlier one, for reasons that will soon become apparent. Over a period of about five months I visited Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

This African venture turned out to be much more difficult than the earlier Hindu-Buddhist one. Here are some of the reasons, which in themselves are instructive about the nature of African spirituality. First of all, it is dangerous to *generalize* about "African religion." For in Africa there are hundreds of distinct, different, and to a great extent unrelated tribes, or to use the more acceptable current expression, traditional ethnic groups. Scholars are divided on the issue of how far one can go in generalizing about African religion. It is multiple and various. If one were to undertake a study of what might be learned from, say, Karamajong spirituality, with the help of such informed scholars as Bruno Vitelli (*Aspects of Karamajong Ethnosociology*, Verona, Museum Combonianum, No. 4, 1988), or of Bunyoro spirituality, assisted by A.B.T. Byarunhanga-Akiiki (*Religion in Bunyoro*, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1982), that would be a different matter. But to generalize about *African* spirituality is more problematical. Nevertheless, I do not believe it is impossible.

Then there is the problem of where and how a Western Christian might experience and learn from African spirituality. I came across nothing to compare with Hindu ashrams or Buddhist monasteries and meditation centers where a participant observer may in some way experience the inner reality of African spirituality. Furthermore, common ancient scriptures are nonexistent in the African tradition. Not that *tradition* is nonexistent, but it is handed on orally, and, when it comes to spirituality, the living contact with ultimates is passed on more through chant and dance, through symbols and proverbs than through scriptures and systematic teaching or writing. In order to understand and appropriate the best in African spirituality one would need to spend many years, having learned the local language (one of hundreds of languages in Africa), as a participant in the life of some traditional African religious group.

For Aylward Shorter, whose writings have been most helpful in my search for African spirituality, the dialogue is hindered by the lack of direct shared experience of African Traditional Religion (henceforth ATR) on the part of the non-African inquirer, and the absence of a tradition and experience of systematic articulation on the part of the traditional African. John Taylor (*The Primal Vision*, 1963) even asserts that Africa, if true to herself, remains stubbornly inarticulate, for myth can only be analyzed when it is dead or dying. Indeed, he sees this primal awareness, uncluttered by reflective thinking, as one of the most prized elements of African spirituality. When the traditional African loses this "primal" experience, we become losers in the dialogue. For dialogue is something more than the exchange of rational reflection. Each partner brings to it a unique and significant mode of communication. This does not mean that Africans are tongue-tied, as anyone who has listened to an African preacher, either in Africa or elsewhere, can attest. But the mode is less "systematic." Shorter, in his *Priest in the Village* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), suggests that the most effective approach is for the non-African inquirer to immerse himself or herself in an African traditional community, rather than require systematic

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articulation from the African traditional person. Shorter has done just that through his years of living experience with the Kimbu in a small African community in Tanzania. Toward the end of his time with them he came to realize that they had wrought significant changes in him:

> From many points of view I was a different person. For one thing, I was quite sure that I could never live again without a fairly intense community life....I found that I was positively in need of company most of the time. I had also come to appreciate a greater depth in human relationships. Another thing the Kimbu had taught me was to integrate my mental life more fully, and to recognize the part which the unconscious played in my whole make-up. I had also learned to feel some sort of continuity between my life and the rest of creation....The extent to which nature spoke to the Kimbu about unseen things was a revelation to me and imparted a growing unity to my own life experience....Aspects of Traditional African Religion, "seeds of the Gospel," had helped to deepen my own Christian faith, and had become a part of my own personal creed.

Another, and greater, difficulty for the student of African spirituality, one which promises to become more acute with the passage of time, is that ATR as an independent reality is fast disappearing from the scene. Indeed, an ATR person who acquires the habit Shorter commends, of systematic verbal expression, runs the danger of becoming alienated from the traditional community. Even the more distinctive and "unassimilated" traditional ethnic groups in more remote parts of Africa are rapidly changing. In the short time, for instance, since Bruni Nivelli prepared his study of the Karamajong, published in 1988, the acquisition of sophisticated modern weapons has significantly changed the patterns of life for this cattle-raiding, mobile ethnic group. With these weapons, the young "warriors" no longer respect the authority of the elders who formerly had the last word.

But that does not mean that ATR can be ignored as unimportant in dealing with the current scene. Even though "traditional Africa" is now largely history, that does not mean it has disappeared. But if we want to understand the working of traditional religious concepts in modern Africa, we cannot neglect seeing them, first of all, as a part of a political and social order which no longer exists in its earlier, pure form.

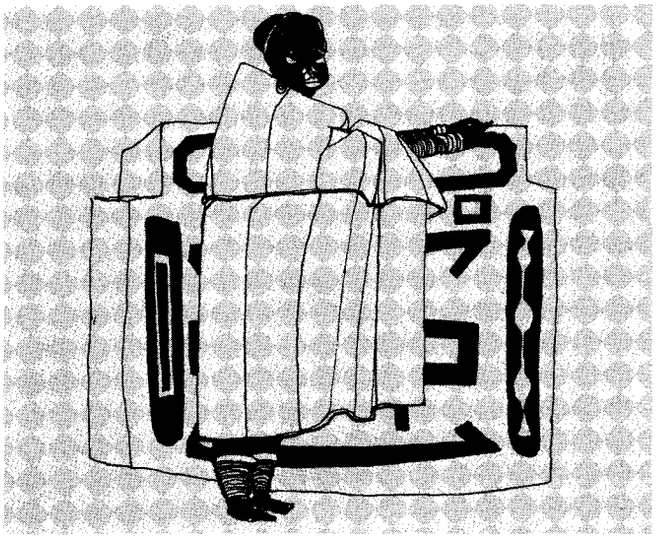
In dealing with Indian and Buddhist spirituality, it was not difficult to enter into certain practices, usually of a meditative character, without becoming a full participant member of a religious community. Once learned, these practices can carry much of the richness of the ancient, durable, and time-tested tradition, and can become integrated into Christian life, without the need of becoming a full-time member of some Hindu of Buddhist group. But African spirituality seems so closely bound to the ongoing, day-by-day life and personal relationships of the group that practical means for one as a non-African Christian to appropriate the resources of African spirituality are difficult to come by.

Furthermore, while the serious spiritual practice of Hindus or Buddhists does not seem to be threatened by the entrance of Christians or Muslims into their world, the same can hardly be said of African spirituality Over thirty years ago Spencer Trimingham wrote that as time passes it is clear that African religion has no future as an organized and formalized religion, and isolated attempts to update and formulate ATR have been academic and unsuccessful. Why? Because indigenous African religion is primarily local and ethnic. African religions generally do not proselytize, and, unlike Hinduism (though it is also, in a sense, an ethnic religion and, for the most part, does not proselytize), do not lay claim to universality. Despite the difficulty of finding and understanding ATR in its pure, but fast-disappearing, forms, it continues to have a lively existence in new guises. One must look at this apparently *disappearing* tradition as it continues to exist among Christians and Muslims, if one wishes to understand modern Africa.

I spoke to some younger missionaries who echoed the somewhat different concern of N. Onwu, an African writer: "The African situation is very painful. Most of Africa experiences tribalism, poverty, corruption, political instability, and economic crisis. These issues have not been seriously faced by most African scholars. Instead, energy has been spent on so-called indigenization" (*Theology Digest*, Summer, 1987). These younger missionaries feel that some form of liberation theology is appropriate, adapted, of course, to the African situation. Much of what is called indigenization or inculturation appears to them now as irrelevant antiquarianism. But these are not, at least not yet, the dominant voices in the countries I visited.

What then are the pervasive and abiding characteristics of ATR which survive in one form or another? My brief and limited experience suggests that, despite the hesitation of the specialized anthropologists, several common characteristics can be identified. I base this conclusion on my own direct observation and on what I have learned and confirmed in conversation with those who have lived many years in many parts of Africa, and from many African novels and scholarly studies.

The first characteristic of African spirituality is an unhesitating



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and unquestioning acceptance of the reality of the invisible world. There will be differences of beliefs about the inhabitants of this "other" world, but its existence is a given and God is its supreme inhabitant. In addition, and seemingly much more important day-by-day, are the ancestors: all of the dead who can be remembered.

An African professor of African religion at Nairobi University gave me an example to illustrate this easy acceptance of and familiarity with the invisible world that God inhabits. At the beginning of a public gathering a Catholic, a Protestant, a Muslim, and a traditional African elder had been asked to give invocations. Three of them assumed special bodily positions—closed eyes, bowed heads—as they prayed. But the elder stood in his normal way, eyes open, staff in hand, and spoke to God in a simple, offhand way, as to a familiar presence. The professor pointed out that for the African, God is not in a special time or place, but part of everything, especially of nature. Yet, with this "ordinariness" of God, there is a sense of quiet reverence for this mystery which is beyond our understanding.

What I saw on a Sunday in Nairobi, probably the most "Westernized" of all African countries apart from South Africa, was tangible evidence of the pervasive religiousness of Africans. Everywhere one looks one sees the evidence of some form of worship; and not only in church buildings, but in all kinds of public places. Men, women, and children dressed in their Sunday best on the way to worship. Half-a-dozen men and women in procession, sometimes in white robes led by a flag-bearer and a drummer. The large tent of a U.S. evangelist in an open field, crowded with listeners. Small groups gathered under trees, with a leader, book in hand. All through places like Kibera and Kangemi, huge squalid shantytowns on the fringes of Nairobi, sounds of drums, and singing, and loud praying from all directions. Passing a movie theater Sunday morning on Nairobi's main street, I was greeted by three smiling and friendly young people, two women and a man, inviting passersby into what becomes, on Sunday morning, a church. There are thousands of these "independent churches" in Kenya, often tribal expressions of religious anticolonialism. No doubt about it, for Africans the reality of the divine is unquestioned; it is an intimate "primal" presence in all material things, indeed, in all of life, nature, soul, and body. That is the first characteristic of African spirituality.

The second characteristic, one which I met over and over again, is the strong sense of community. Historically, in Africa community has not been an optional extra, but, for the individual, a basic condition of survival. I was told by one missionary that in an African hospital where she works, even the hospital staff will not care for those who have been rejected by their own community. Interdependence and interrelatedness are present as an operative reality for the African from the earliest years of life. Consequently, separate individual spiritual practice, such as we know in Buddhism, for example, or in Christianity, seems to be alien to African spirituality. One consequence of this, already noted, is that it is difficult for an outsider to enter into the style of African spirituality without becoming an ongoing and fully participating part of an African religious community. Still, to the extent that Christian groups continue to embody this quality, persons like myself can to a degree experience this trait of African spirituality. Indeed, it may well be that African Christian—and Muslim—communities will be the milieu in which this characteristic of African spirituality will be most effectively maintained, preserved, and brought to fulfillment. When I asked an experienced missionary whether the monarchical position of the chief lessened the significance of community authority, I was corrected and informed that in the communities with which she is familiar, all voices were heard, and the chief was less an autocrat than a facilitator of community consensus after all had been heard.

The third characteristic of African spirituality is its delight in celebration. Dance, drums, festivities, singing together—these group activities are omnipresent. No need to dragoon people for things like choir practice. They love it. Probably my most vivid experience of this enthusiasm for celebration was the Easter vigil in a parish church in Zambia. There were about forty uniformly dressed, young teenage girls who led the procession into the church, dancing and singing as they swayed down the aisle. Another larger group of older women sang with a volume which shook the roof. At frequent intervals the progress of the liturgy at the altar paused for a long stretch of singing and dancing. At the end of the vigil, the young girls led the procession out before the entrance to the church, where the singing and dancing and ululating continued spontaneously on and on into the night. Anyone who has had the experience of celebrating with a black community in the U.S. can recognize that this is where it all came from.

All three of these characteristics have their shadow side. The unquestioning acceptance of the invisible world needs continuing discrimination to preserve it from superstition and fear. The strong sense of community can become a harmful tribalism that only with difficulty acknowledges the larger reality of the nation or the human family as a whole. The delight in celebration can become so inflated that it bankrupts families after a wedding, or religious communities after a vow celebration. There is a danger of offense to relatives and friends unless all the stops are pulled out for such special events.

What can we learn from African spirituality? Our secular culture, so caught up in what we can touch and see, needs to experience the presence and the power of what we cannot see. Our overemphasis on what can be reasoned and calculated, our instinctive desire to master nature may learn something from the African sensitivity to being in tune with nature and the cosmos.

The self-centered individualism and the impersonalism of our mass culture could learn something from Africa's strong sense of community and interpersonal intimacy, of the unfailing wonder and delight in human relationships which John Taylor writes of. And finally, perhaps most important of all, our workaholic inability to really *play* might be corrected by the African delight in simple, impractical, not cost-efficient celebration.

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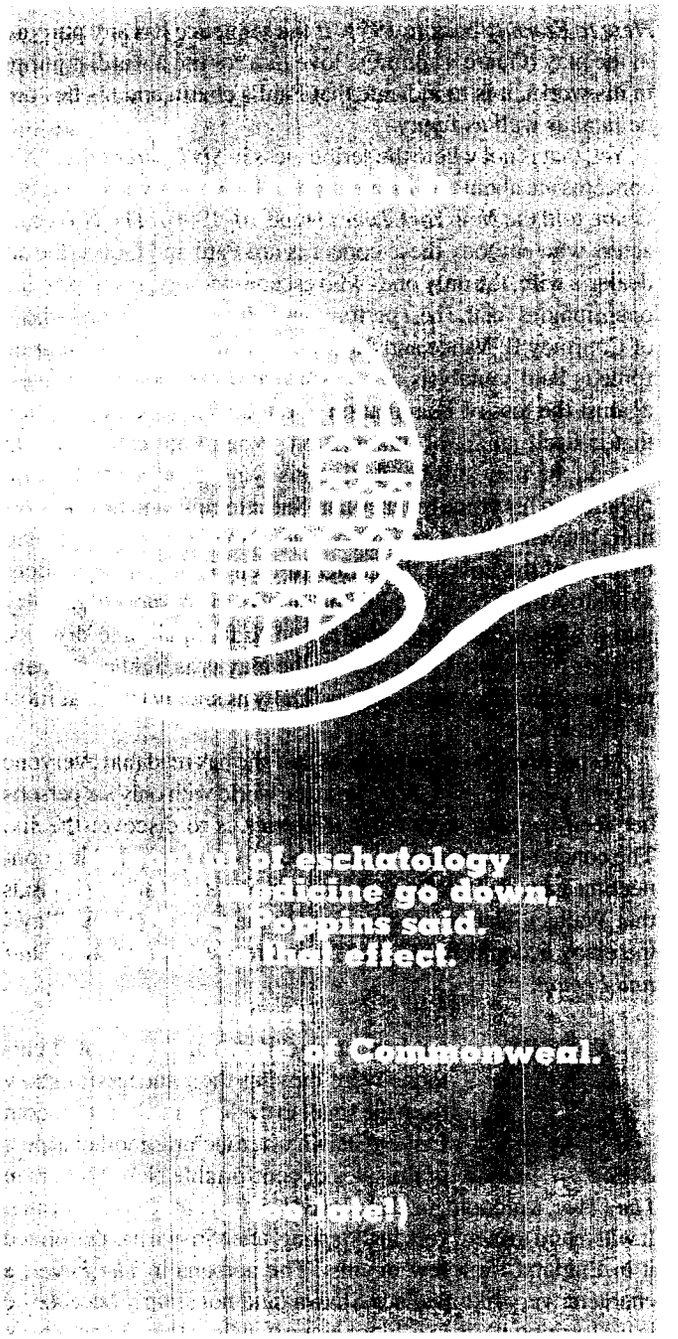
DEGREES OF DIFFERENCE

'SIX DEGREES' & 'FEVER'

By now presumably everyone—or everyone who reads celebrity gossip columns—knows that John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* is distantly based on events that took place in 1983; a teen-ager, passing himself off as Sidney Poitier's son, imposed on several affluent New Yorkers, pretending to be a friend or classmate of their children, cleaned-out by a mugger and in need of temporary shelter. The success of Guare's play has turned the real con man—whose name happily escapes me—into a celebrity of sorts. A friend of mine tells me that during a recent television interview the young man was asked what his gullible hosts were like. "Very shallow people," was his answer. Whether or not that is an accurate description of the original victims, it is clearly a proper label for Guare's good-Samaritan suckers.

Caricature is central to Guare's most successful work—*The House of Blue Leaves*, for instance—so it is not surprising that the characters in *Six Degrees* are broadly comic figures, made the more obvious by the presidential style, the fragmentation that never allows them the space or the time to develop. Much of the action of the play takes place offstage and is announced to the audience or to other characters. The one deception that we witness involves an art dealer, more concerned with the deal than the art; his wife, who has a talent for non sequitur; and their guest, a liberal South African billionaire. Having enchanted the three of them, the fake Paul Poitier manages to lose his cozy nest when he is discovered in bed with a male hustler, a scene which establishes his homosexuality (useful later in the play) and allows a naked actor to run around the stage. The other too willing hosts include a foundation executive and a doctor, but their occupational levels are meaningless in a context which demands only that they be beguiled by the prospect of meeting a "moviestar" and appearing in a film version of *Cats*. Their children are classic cliché brats, college-age parent-haters with no redeeming qualities. Much of this is intended as an abrasive joke, of course, and there are funny lines, but the play lacks the inspired kookiness of the best of *Blue Leaves*. Jerry Zaks, who directed the successful revival of that play at Lincoln Center in 1986, is again bringing his hard-punching style to Guare, but this time the result is noisy nervousness.

A sentimental subplot emerges late in this very brief play when Paul, momentarily without prosperous gulls, meets a naive couple in the park—innocents from Utah or somewhere in the West who have come to conquer the city—and moves in with them, steals their money, and—offstage—seduces the young man, who discovers he likes sex with another man and promptly kills himself. I don't think there has been a character like that since the soldier who blew out his brains in James Jones's *From*



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Here to Eternity back in 1951. If the sequence has any purpose in the play (Guare's admirers love him for the absurdist jumps in his work), it is to indicate that Paul's charm and his lies can be fatal as well as funny.

Yet, that is not where the seriousness in *Six Degrees* lies. "My concerns are about the imagination and how we live in this city," Guare told the *New York Times* (June 10, 1990). The two characters who embody these concerns are Paul and Ouisa, the art dealer's wife, the only ones who escape stereotype and provide opportunities for the best performances in the production—those of Courtney B. Vance and Stockard Channing. Vance's tour de force is Paul's analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a protest against the loss of imagination in our society—a presentation that is itself an act of imagination. When Paul calls Ouisa at the end, he may still be playing his lying games, but the desperation in his voice reaches her. She attempts and fails to save him, but what she is trying to save is the perception, planted by him, of the hole at the center of their lives. Channing does a fine transition here, turning the ditzy dame of most of the play into a woman with the imagination to feel pain and distress. Guare's theme is a solid one, but the play is as light as its mannerisms; amiably attractive, it is finally as slickly trivial as most of its characters.

At some point, Ouisa explains that she has read that everyone is connected with everyone else in the world with only six persons between you and whomever. The trick is to discover the six. The conceit gives Guare his title, but if I am going to play connection games, I prefer the network of interconnected minds that Wallace Shawn proffers in "On the Context of the Play," the essay accompanying the Grove Press edition of *Aunt Dan and Lemon*.

As it happens, while Guare's animated cartoons were moving their successful show from the small to the large theater at Lincoln Center, Shawn was touching another aspect of the lives of comfortable New Yorkers in *The Fever*, a monologue that played briefly at the Public Theater. It will return to New York in the spring, after Shawn has performed it in England for a few months. The persona in *The Fever*, a character very like Wallace Shawn (and not simply because he is performing it), is in a "poor country where they do not speak my language," suffering from the titular fever. Between bouts of vomiting, he recalls, lovingly, his protected childhood, bemoans his affluence in the face of the world's poor, defends that affluence (sounding like Aunt Dan), and imagines retribution for the life he leads. His presentation assumes that the audience shares his background and his anxiety. His fever is not physical; it is metaphysical. It is his inability to keep those others, those accusers, at bay. Unlike the characters in *Six Degrees*, he has the imagination to see people more clearly than his upbringing taught him he should. One review that I read suggested that *The Fever* is a dated Marxist critique, but the reviewer simplified in a way that Shawn, who has one of the most fascinating minds in contemporary American drama, never could. There is no cure in *The Fever*. There is only the disease, the portrait of a man trapped by perceptions that pull him deeper and deeper into a disaffection with his own life while he tries desperately to hold on to the perquisites of his position. *The Fever*'s fever is societally induced anguish.

The production consists of Shawn's sitting onstage alone and talking for almost two hours. There are occasional humorous lines and images and changes of voice (indicating sides of his character) to break the even flow of the monologue, but it is a demanding work passing itself off as a comfortable conversation. It is never going to reach the large audience that has made *Six Degrees of Separation* a hit, but I was happier—which is to say, more uncomfortable—with Shawn than with Guare.

GERALD WEALES

SCREEN

A FILMMAKER'S INSTINCTS

COSTNER'S 'DANCES WITH WOLVES'

The very first shot of *Dances with Wolves* announces what the rest of the film confirms: Kevin Costner has a filmmaker's eye. It selects. It rejects. It dramatizes.

That first shot, a lengthy one, is of wounded legs at one end of an operating table. The point-of-view is from the opposite end of the table where the patient's unseen head rests. Two pairs of hands are examining the bloody damage; two voices agree that gangrene hasn't set in yet, that an operation is in order, but that a few reviving cups of coffee must be downed by the exhausted doctors before any cutting takes place. Between the victim's feet, we can see in the distance a group of Union soldiers at rest.

The two surgeons go off for their coffee. (We haven't once glimpsed their faces.) Brief silence. A grunt, a moan, a rustling as the patient raises himself. First cut in the film: Reverse angle on the patient's face, Kevin Costner playing John Dunbar. Costner looks at the surgical instruments laid out and guesses what is in store for him. The next fifteen minutes of the film show the result of his decision to die rather than suffer amputation: his suicidal charge into enemy fire not only fails to bring about his death but saves his limbs and wins him military glory.

The remaining two hours and forty-five minutes of *Dances with Wolves* show the consequence of a different brand of courage: during his one-man occupation of a far-flung western outpost in Sioux territory soon after the war, Costner's decision to fight on behalf of the natives leads him to reject the goals of his government and his caste. The courage that brought him medals was born of suicidal desperation; the courage born of compassion and premeditation makes him a traitor.

That finely discriminatory visual sense that decided to render the surgical hands synecdochic rather than turn the doctors into conventionally photographed bit players, that reserved the first close-up of the movie for the hero who will appear in nearly every subsequent scene, that established his fear of amputation

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with a shot of fly-attracting instruments, operates in high gear throughout the film. It makes *Dances with Wolves* one of the finest adventure movies of recent years, not unworthy of *Lawrence of Arabia, The Black Stallion,* and *The Man Who Would Be King*. Costner's effort suffers from problematic elements that the creators of *Stallion* and *Man*, with their more straightforward subjects, never had to deal with, and that David Lean, in *Lawrence*, nearly conquered. But, like directors Huston, Lean, and Carroll Ballard, Costner never tosses action and special effects in the viewer's face but always searches for the excitement inherent in each scene.

Costner has cast good actors and elicited good work from them as well. Mary McDonnell as a white woman brought up by the Sioux is too conscious of the great bone structure in her lovely Irish face, and darts and drops her eyes to the point of coyness. But she captures perfectly the effort to speak English after thirty years of not hearing, speaking, or thinking it. The Native American actors are superb—Rodney Grant, Graham Greene, Floyd Red Crow Westerman, Tantoo Cardinal, Doris Leader Charge. And Costner's decision to use subtitles under the Sioux dialogue allows us to register inflections, stumblings, sarcasms that we otherwise would miss. The veristic, restrained acting plus the subtitles bring us closer to these Sioux than we have ever been to movie Native Americans. They are seen neither as aboriginal devils nor as nature's nobility but simply as people.

So *Dances with Wolves* is a masterpiece, right? Well, no. All the elements I have praised help portray the panorama that forms around John Dunbar, but who is he? After helping his Sioux comrades win a battle, Dunbar states that only the new tribal name they have honored him with, "Dances-with-Wolves," has any meaning for him, and that his white man's name is just a hollow sound, thereby telling us that his past life lacked substance. But what past life? Nothing of Dunbar's background is alluded to on screen, and Costner's performance—the weakest one in the movie—doesn't fill the lacunas in Michael Blake's script. Given a simple, straight-arrow role like Eliot Ness, Costner can use the reserve and quizzicality in his personality to color and slightly deepen the part. But he never makes the vaguely written Dunbar more than a well-meaning, somewhat shambling fellow with limp blond hair.

Costner is clearly infatuated with Dunbar and this bias disfigures aspects of his movie. In the opening scenes, with Dunbar a loyal soldier in the Union army, the other soldiers are portrayed as decent chaps (a fatherly general, lots of boys in blue cheering Dunbar's suicidal charge). But later, after Dunbar aligns himself with the natives, the army men are portrayed (with one nebulous exception) as uniformly bigoted and bestial. I grant that the Union cause was nobler than the removal of the native tribes, but Costner's bias toward whoever fights alongside Dunbar leads him to caricature Indians as well as white men, namely the Pawnee, enemies of the Sioux. I'm not disputing the naturalness of Dunbar's decision to fight against the enemies of the people he has lived with, but Costner virtually dehumanizes the Pawnees. True, the Pawnee battle garb and hairdress lend themselves to an impression of fierceness, but why does Costner photograph the warriors against blood-red skies and underscore their movements with ominous music? Why, when the Pawnees kill, do their victims die in agony (with the Pawnees scalping them *before* they expire), while the Sioux always kill quickly, cleanly, and in self-defense? Did the Sioux never show aggression or cruelty toward their neighbors? I think that the demonizations of both whites and Pawnees in this movie stem not from liberal guilt-tripping but from leading-actor egomania. Love me, love my sidekicks.

In this, his directorial debut, Costner establishes himself as a master of cinematic composition and movement and as a sympathetic director of actors. However, as a film dramatist, he needs to stop playing favorites.

But don't let any of my reservations keep you from seeing *Dances with Wolves*. It may not be a masterpiece but, playing in the same multiplex theaters with *Rocky V* and *Predator II*, it seems like a miracle. RICHARD ALLEVA

MEDIA

THE TRIALS OF TV ACTING

THE TRIUMPH OF SHARON GLESS

"I'm not an actor—I'm a movie star!" That's the wonderful line croaked by Peter O'Toole's character in *My Favorite Year,* when he discovers that the skit he is supposed to perform on an early fifties TV show is going to be done live, and instantly seen in millions of homes. What makes the line so funny is not just that it invokes the old—and by now largely pointless—snobbism of "the thaytah" about the movies, but that it does so in the context of TV: because if there is *any* dramatic medium that seems to render the concept of acting as an art almost completely irrelevant, surely it is the Tube.

Let's admit it. In TV, as Robert Frost earlier observed of walls, something there is that does not like an actor. Wonderfully effective TV actors, like James Garner, David Janssen, and Tom Selleck, have consistently failed to carry their special power over from the small to the large screen, and this can*not* be blamed on "bad scripts." Of the few who have made the crossover—Clint Eastwood, say, and Sally Field—it has to be said that the films they make are largely, and cleverly, tailored to the distinctive one-dimensionality they first carved out on the Tube. Dirty Harry and all of Clint's other avatars are all first cousins of the tight-lipped, whispering Rowdy Yates of "Rawhide." And as for all those spunky, naive but goodhearted gals (*sure* the word is sexist—so are the movies) portrayed by Field, come on: Sister Bertrille in jeans is still Sister Bertrille.

No. If you check out any of the TV nostalgia or trivia-quiz books that seem to be always flooding the market, you notice something curious. The faces with instant recognition-quotient, the faces by which we mark our fifty-year love affair with the Tube, are generally not the faces of actors at all, but the faces

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of clowns (Milton Berle through Lucy to Candice Bergen), prophets (John Cameron Swayze through Cronkite to Peter Jennings), "real people" (Joe McCarthy to the sad people on "America's Funniest Home Videos"), or caricatures (Howdy Doody through Big Bird to the Simpsons). Damn few actors—who, whatever theory of drama you were force-fed in sophomore year—ought to be clowns *and* prophets *and* caricatures, all at the same time.

Does this mean that TV is, as its detractors like to say, a mere commodity, inimical to the finer articulations of drama? That the Tube reduces the actor's craft to nothing more than a harmonic in the brainless carrier-wave of the cathode ray? (I remember—I swear—as a kid seeing Lee J. Cobb perform the last soliloquy of *King Lear* on "The Dean Martin Show" right between a troupe of Russian acrobats and Dean's closing, sloshed medley at the piano.)

Again, no: it means that we all ought to celebrate Sharon Gless and her new series, "The Trials of Rosie O'Neill."

The very bright Katrine Ames has already highlighted "Rosie O'Neill" in *Newsweek* (November 5), so the show is probably assured of survival for at least its first season. This is good news because the show's producer, Barry Rosenzweig, who also guided "Cagney and Lacey" (Gless played Christine Cagney) is one of the few people out there who seems capable of dealing with "controversial" subjects and dealing with them from a stance of moral maturity: a Norman Lear with wit. It's even better news because watching Gless work at her craft week after week gives the same intense pleasure as watching *anybody* really good do what they do (Paula Abdul dancing, John Sununu prevaricating), and also because Gless—I'm serious about this—is virtually defining what TV acting, as high art, is all about.

The premise is almost preemptively ho-hum: Rosie O'Neill (Gless) is a forty-three-year-old, recently divorced woman with a law degree trying to work out her sense of pain and loss by working the Public Defender side of the street in Los Angeles. Oh, yeah: she also comes from this *very* well-heeled family, and so is regarded as something of your white liberal twit by most of the other studiously ethnic lawyers in her office. One can almost hear, as if it were Fibber McGee's mythic closet, the clichés about to start tumbling.

But they don't. Rosenzweig is a good and smart producer and hires good and smart screenwriters. And Gless—who has a face and a tone of voice that are damn near a working definition of integrity—seems capable of making almost *any* line sound like human speech uttered by a human person.

That is no small accomplishment for any actor, but the fascinating thing is that Gless does it *on* and *for* TV. On the stage you have to project: any emotion you convey has to be seen by the people in the back row, or otherwise you haven't earned your pay. On the big screen you have to reflect: from an actor's perspective, the special quality of film is that it puts *everybody* in the front row, so that what might work on stage has to be carefully toned down to the gigantic intimacy of the close-up. Think about the last shot of *Godfather II*: Al Pacino with the thousand-yard stare and no dialogue and no movement, and if that is not "great acting," then we might as well trash the concept altogether.

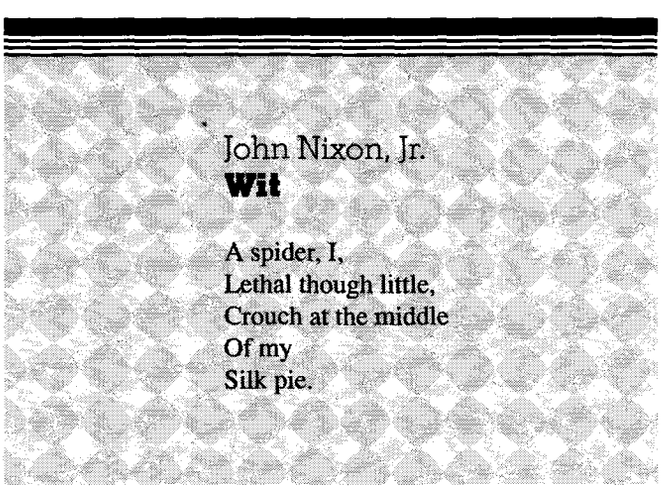
But what about TV? And Sharon Gless? Well: every episode of "Rosie O'Neill" begins with Rosie talking in her shrink's office about what has traumatized her that week: bitterness over the divorce, memories of her father, problems dating younger men, etc. And as the camera circles around her—like a predator?—Rosie simultaneously reveals her neurotic pain and bravely, failingly, strives to maintain an ironic distance from it, as if she is, after all, in control. If you've ever been on the couch yourself, you know how common and how desperately important this kind of performance is to sustain. But for Gless to mime it so brilliantly and so regularly is nothing less than an actor's *tour de force*.

Those openings are, of course, crucial to the political point of *Rosie O'Neill*: as a Public Defender Rosie is frequently in the position of defending the indefensible, for the sake of the Law: the Law of nations *or* the Law of human self-consciousness, which demands that even the most monstrous within ourselves be allowed its voice, since to deny or repress that voice is to deny and repress our full humanity. The pain we feel in defending the "obviously" guilty is like the pain we feel in gazing into our own most arid desert places. But it's a pain that has to be endured, if we are ever to be whole.

This is really the special quality Janssen and Selleck and, at her best, Mary Tyler Moore, brought to the business of TV acting: realizing that the great TV actor neither projects nor reflects, but—because of the almost erotic intimacy of the Tube—simply allows his/her vulnerability to emerge under the gaze of the small-screen camera. What makes Gless special is that she seems fully aware of what she's doing, fully aware that her little twitches and voice cracks and misdirected eye-movements are the building-blocks of a new version of one of the most venerable arts.

The *real* Cagney—James—once said to a nervous young Pamela Tiffin on the set of his last starring movie, *One, Two, Three*, something that is virtually a compendium of, and a blessing upon, the actor's art. "Don't be afraid," he told her. "Just walk on to the set, plant your feet, and tell the truth." I like to think that, somewhere, that great and gifted man is smiling and nodding at the work of the tough and witty woman who was once his namesake.

FRANK McCONNELL



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Inculturation & the leaven of the gospel

EUGENE HILLMAN

In 1979, Karl Rahner delivered a famous lecture at Weston School of Theology on inculturation. To dramatize the meaning of inculturation, Rahner asked some sharp, rhetorical questions: Why must the church insist upon a specifically European form of marriage for all African Christians? In some cases, why not allow the plural marriage model (simultaneous polygyny) congenial to Africans still living within traditional cultures and subsistence economic systems? After all, this was the model of the patriarchs of Israel, was in accord with the Mosaic law, and although prohibited by pre-Christian Roman law, was not specifically proscribed by the New Testament.

Another of Rahner's questions concerned the use of European food and drink in the eucharistic celebrations of people for whom bread and wine are totally alien. On this issue a contemporary Nigerian priest has argued in a doctoral dissertation at Louvain's Catholic University that if church leaders were really serious about the catholicization of the church, elements other than bread and grape wine could and should be used.

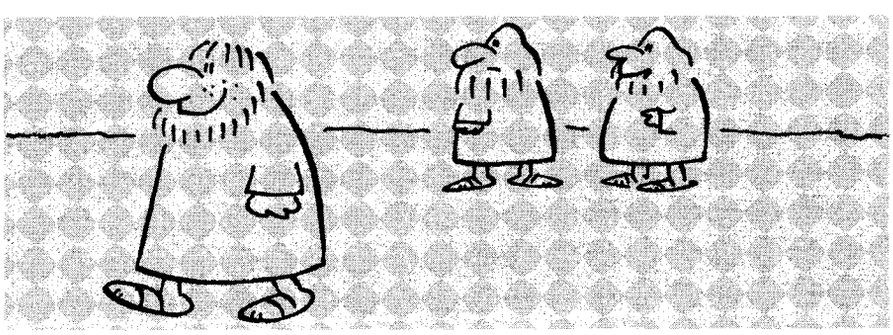
Inculturation, called "incarnation" by Vatican II, is the dynamic principle by which Christianity grows in cultural catholicity by allowing the leaven of the gospel to act in culturally diverse ways of being human, religious, and holy. It is more radical than liberation theology, and its implications are further reaching. The three volumes reviewed here say almost everything that needs to be said on the subject. Their application is needed urgently. Doing so means facing up to major obstacles, not only in Africa, Asia, and the Islands, but in Europe and the Americas. But if taken seriously, the emerging theology of inculturation promises a new Pentecost for the church.

Peter Schineller is a theologian; Anthony Gittins and Aylward Shorter are anthropologists. All are priests with some years of direct missionary experience in Africa. Their works are complementary. The contribution of Peter Schineller, who is currently working in Nigeria, has the character of an introduction; it is quite readable and could serve as an excellent outline for a course preparing people for cross-cultural ministry anywhere. Anthony Gittins approaches inculturation from the specific vantage point of a professional anthropologist with missionary experience in Sierra Leone. He writes lucidly and practically, yet profoundly, about the cross-cultural communication of Christianity. The work of Aylward Shorter, who was many years in Kenya and in Tanzania, is more comprehensive than the others; it is an admirable integration of the relevant historical, theological, and anthropological themes.

The obstacles to authentic inculturation are formidable. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the distinguished historian of religion, has noted that "the fundamental flaw of Western civilization in its role in world history is arrogance, and ...this has infected also the Christian church." The crudest expression of this is found in the 1452 papal bull of Nicholas V, *Dum diversas*, authorizing the king of Portugal "the full and entire faculty of invading, conquering, expelling, and reigning over all the kingdoms...of the Saracens, of pagans, and of all infidels, wherever they may be found; of reducing their inhabitants to perpetual slavery; of appropriating to yourself those kingdoms and all their possessions for your own use and that of your successors." Papal rhetoric is quite the opposite these days, but the destruction sanctioned by Nicholas continued into the present century, albeit with methods gradually less brutal than those employed by the *conquistadores*.

Deep scars—political, economic, social, cultural—remain today in many areas colonized by Christian Europe. They manifest themselves in the perverse and confused self-images and attitudes of both the victims and the beneficiaries of that history. Christian missionaries failed to distinguish between the gospel message of Christ and the Western accretions of Christianity. Instead of allowing their hearers to experience the meaning of Jesus Christ in their own historico-cultural terms, missionaries acted like the agents of a European export firm (Rahner's simile), supplying the rest of the world a fully developed and cultur-

EUGENE HILLMAN, C.S.Sp., *professor of liberal studies at Salve Regina College, Newport, Rhode Island, served in Africa for twenty-five years. His most recent book is* Many Paths: A Catholic Approach to Religious Pluralism *(Orbis).*



"That's the Prodigal Son—I understand he's planning a comeback."

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Books Discussed in this Essay

A Handbook of Inculturation, *Peter Schineller, S.J., Paulist Press, $8.95, 141 pp.*

Gifts and Strangers: Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation, *Anthony J. Gittins, C.S.Sp., Paulist Press, $9.95, 144 pp.*

Towards a Theology of Inculturation, *Aylward Shorter, Orbis Books, $16.95, 291 pp.*

ally packaged product: the historically-conditioned European experience of Christianity.

Evangelization becomes problematical when the acceptance of Jesus Christ is inseparable from this European interpretation of the Gospel, or when acceptance entails renouncing even the possibility of fully experiencing, interpreting, and celebrating this faith in specifically non-Western ways of being human and religious. Why must the principal outward signs of faith in Jesus Christ be so insistently European, from the structures, forms, and accouterments of worship to the very names given at baptism? Even today in Africa, where a growing number of politicians and some churchmen are now identifying themselves by their traditional cultural names instead of the European names given them at baptism, names such as Patrick, Pasquale, and Amadeus proliferate as though there were something wrong with names like Nagudana, Lemalali, or Oltimbu. Imagine what Christian worship would look like if believers were permitted to celebrate their faith through the traditional symbols, art forms, and social structures of their respective worlds; if non-Western peoples were encouraged to express their Christian belief through the idioms, styles, and gestures of their own indigenous systems of communication. And imagine what their traditional ethical systems would be like if the gospel were honestly allowed to function within them as a leaven, rather than being told, in the name of Christ, that they must conform their behavior to the mores of Western civilization.

An applied theology of inculturation, based on a renewed understanding of the Incarnation of the divine Word, could make the ecclesiastical transformation attributed to liberation theology look modest by comparison. For one people to dominate other peoples politically and exploit them economically is a great injustice, a form of slavery. But to undermine the indigenous cultures of subjected peoples, thereby attenuating their traditional self-understanding, identity, values, and dignity, is an even greater injustice. It deprives them of their most fundamental means of self-assertion and defense against exploitation, leading them to gradually internalize the most problematic values of the culture imposed.

The question is therefore both anthropological and theological. Is the historico-cultural experience of Christianity universally normative for all Christians always and everywhere? Or is it but one among many valid ways of understanding, practicing, and celebrating the meaning of Christianity? This is the issue of pluralism raised by Paul against the Judaizers, by the Jesuits in China and India against the Europeanizers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by African and Asian Christians today in the wake of Western colonialism.

The implications of the inculturation movement are similar to, but broader than, the work of those liberation theologians who stress the socioeconomic and political aspects of liberation. Some have been slow to appreciate the concern of Africans and Asians with Western Christianity's insults to their cultures, and have failed to address the perennial cultural predicament of their own indigenous populations in Latin America. There is much they can learn from the inculturationists. Likewise, African and Asian Christians need to take to heart the lessons drawn from the socioeconomic and political insights of the liberationists.

A major obstacle to inculturation is the naive belief that the higher ranks of ecclesiastical officialdom mean what they say about the church's will to assume the cultural flesh of all the peoples of the world. While the rhetoric is edifying, the concrete achievements are few. Even the widely hailed Zaire Mass and the often mentioned Zimbabwe funeral rite are tokens, reluctantly approved by higher authority because of the persistence of rare personalities like Cardinal Joseph Malula of Zaire. Nor are these particular instances relevant to a wide variety of ethnocultural groups in either Zaire of Zimbabwe, let alone in other African countries. Rooted in Shona custom, the Zimbabwe funeral rite is as foreign to the Masai of Kenya and Tanzania as an Irish wake.

One prominent African bishop told me that fewer than half a dozen of his episcopal colleagues—Africans themselves—had any positive interest in inculturating the Christian faith experience in African cultural forms. While relevant research in Africa is almost nonexistent, local bishops remain hostile to it. As Bernard Lonergan noted in *Insight*: "One might as well declare openly that all new ideas are taboo, as to require that they be examined, even evaluated, and approved by some hierarchy of officials and bureaucrats; for members of this hierarchy possess authority and power in inverse ratio to their familiarity with the concrete situations in which the new ideas emerge; they never know whether or not the new idea will work; much less can they divine how it might be corrected or developed; and since the one thing they dread is making a mistake, they devote their energies to paper work and postpone decisions." Add to this Shorter's carefully nuanced remarks on the ambivalence detected in some of the otherwise positive and encouraging statements of Pope John Paul II about non-Western cultures, the pope's repeated warnings against the danger of syncretism in any effort to apply the principle of inculturation, and Cardinal Ratzinger's skepticism regarding third-world cultures, described by Shorter as "a position not far removed from monoculturalism."

During the 1977 Synod of Bishops in Rome, as during the previous synod, the European monoculturalism chronically afflicting the church was addressed eloquently by various bishops from Asia and Africa. But it was Pedro Arrupe, then superior general of the Jesuits, who put his finger on the urgency of dealing openly with the church's retarded growth in cultural catholicity. In his address to the bishops, Arrupe argued that "the present crisis of

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unity in many cases is due to insufficient pluralism which fails to provide the satisfaction of expressing and living one's faith in conformity with one's culture." This failure, he noted, was the result of those "fears that arise to block inculturation or to diminish it." To those who feel threatened by new or different expressions and celebrations that "might possibly contradict what we [Europeans] have formulated and practiced up to now," Arrupe replied that "real pluralism is the most profound unity." What the church needs today is not more stifling conformity but greater liberating pluriformity. □

BOOKS

The minuet of racial politics

THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER
Shelby Steele
St. Martin's, $15.95, 175 pp.

Don Wycliff

This brief collection of essays is the finest literary exploration of the mindscape of black America since Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man*. In fact, I was reminded of the Ellison work numerous times as I read this book, and not just because of Shelby Steele's occasional references to it.

For all their superficial differences, there are powerful and important similarities between the two authors and their works. Like Ellison, Steele is a graceful, elegant writer. He is not a propagandist, as Ellison was not and as almost every other writer on this subject in recent decades has been to some degree. Steele has an appreciation of complexity and ambivalence, as Ellison did. And most important, he is relentlessly, ruthlessly honest, as Ellison was and as it is so difficult for any black person to be when writing on race.

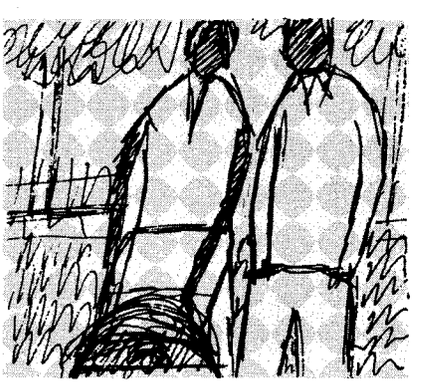
Just why that is has been demonstrated over the last year or so, as parts of this book appeared as articles in various publications, from the *New York Times Magazine* to *Harper's* to the *Wilson Quarterly*. Among the nation's so-called black leadership, Shelby Steele's name now is mentioned in company with those of Thomas Sowell, Glenn Loury, and others who have dared dissent from what Steele calls the "party line" on matters of race and civil rights.

In the past, what has followed that is ridicule and shunning. For a great many reasons, that has become impossible to do any longer. It's hard to persuade ordinary black people nowadays that having doubts or a different reading of their situation is the same thing as treason.

Steele's view is that racism, while far from eradicated, is not the monster that it once was; that "the barriers to black progress in America today are clearly as much psychological as they are social or economic"; and that only blacks themselves can overcome that barrier.

"The psychological realm is murky, frightening, and just plain embarrassing," he writes early on. "And a risk is involved in exploring it: the risk of discovering the ways in which we contribute to, if not create, the reality in which we live. Denial, avoidance, and repression intervene to save us from this risk. But, of course, they only energize what is repressed with more and more negative power, so that we are victimized as much by our own buried fears as by racism."

Black students in predominantly white



colleges, black professionals in integrated work situations, black homeowners in comfortable, integrated, middle-class neighborhoods—all show in various ways the effects of buried racial fears and seek refuge in what Steele considers dubious and destructive solutions, like affirmative action.

It is his public questioning of that policy, as much as anything, that accounts for the heartburn that Steele causes his critics. And it is in his discussion of affirmative action that he demonstrates how perceptive he is about the psychological traps involved in the issue of race.

In theory, he says, "affirmative action...has all the moral symmetry that fairness requires—the injustice of historical and even contemporary white advantage is offset with black advantage; preference replaces prejudice, inclusion answers exclusion. It is reformist and corrective, even repentant and redemptive. And I would never sneer at these good intentions."

But the trap, Steele argues, is that these intentions have been translated largely into requirements for racial representation, not racial development. Affirmative action "fosters a confusion of these very different needs," he says. And it is "the music of innocence and power that we hear in affirmative action that causes us to cling to it and to its distracting emphasis on representation."

Innocence and power, Steele believes, are the nub of modern race relations. They have become like steps in a minuet that Americans dance in their relations across racial lines.

Whites seek to be shriven of a guilt that

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they feel, even if only unconsciously, for the historical disadvantages that were visited upon blacks—and for the illegitimate advantage that they enjoy as a result. Blacks seek power in the only way they have ever successfully wielded it: by flaunting their victimization and inducing guilt in whites.

Steele describes the minuet beautifully. He also describes its corrosive effects, including programs and gestures calculated not to promote genuine black development, but to give whites a feeling of innocence and blacks a semblance of power. Unfortunately, such power can never be more than a semblance. And even that is disappearing now, as whites grow weary of the dance.

The challenge for blacks now, says Steele, "is to reclaim ourselves from the exaggerations of our own memory and to go forward as the free American citizens that we are. There is no magic that will make development happen. We simply have to want more for ourselves, be willing to work for it, and not use our enemy...as an excuse not to pursue it."

A LAND OF PASSWORD

LIES OF SILENCE
Brian Moore
Doubleday, $18.95, 197 pp.

Crystal Gromer

"Whatever you say say nothing," the title of a poem in Seamus Heaney's 1975 volume *North*, could serve as apt epigraph for Brian Moore's new novel, *Lies of Silence*, which takes him—perhaps as reluctantly as his main character—back to Belfast, his birthplace.

For the lies that Moore sees raging in Ulster, "lies told over the years to poor Protestant working people about the Catholics, lies to poor Catholic working people about the Protestants, lies from parliaments and pulpits, lies at rallies and funeral orations"—are not only sins of commission, but at their worst, they are lies of silence, the lies that come of saying nothing, and sins of omission as well. Most guilty are those in Westminister who turn a blind eye to Ulster and its injustices.

The Northern habit of survival rests in silence. "Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us," Heaney says, and fifteen years later, the characters in Moore's Belfast agree; when they dissent, their act of speech is rained upon by violence or by the threat of it. Perhaps only the Middle East, for many of the same causes— some even having the same agents, Lloyd George, Alfred Balfour, their double-sided negotiating in the first decades of this century, and timeless imperial greed among them—seems as hopeless of resolution as Northern Ireland. "Another martyr for the cause?" a mother, exasperated, questions her daughter in Moore's novel. Weary, she continues, "A united Ireland? Have some sense. The South of Ireland doesn't want us and couldn't take care of us if we were handed to them on a plate tomorrow. It's all madness, this, madness, and don't you be going and getting mixed up in it."

Whatever you say, say nothing: the mother's theme. Brian Moore's theme, however, is not only about the costs of saying nothing in that slippery grey Ulster Heaney calls a "land of password, handgrip, wink and nod," but also about the costs of getting mixed up in it all the same and finding oneself unable to say nothing. That is what happens to Michael Dillon. On the night he has come home ready to tell his wife that he is leaving her for another woman (just as he is leaving Belfast for London), on the night he has gathered together his courage and his passport, he encounters not visions of his new life, but four frighteningly young terrorists of the IRA. Hooded in woolen balaclavas, armed, they force Michael and Moira Dillon to get up from bed and wait for dawn in their living room, watched over by first one guard, then another. Their plan is to place a bomb in Michael's car, and then have him drive it to the hotel he manages, where an Ian Paisley figure named Dr. Pottinger is to address a breakfast audience. As the hotel manager, Dillon will pass through the security guard and park his car in his accustomed spot, just under the windows where Pottinger is to speak. So the assassination is to go, without warning. Moira remains behind in the living room, hostage to the plan's success.

On his drive through the streets of Belfast that morning, Michael Dillon observes details with the hypersensitivity of the newly condemned: three boys rushing and shouting on their way to school, the equestrian statue showing King William in victory at the Boyne, the Victorian houses around Queen's University, alight that day with the festivities of graduation. All these things are almost unbearably alive to him on a drive that seems interminable, packed as it is with the observations of a lifetime, packed as it is with a bomb. The hotel is an eternity and a second away. He parks his car. Overhead, he hears a tour group discussing the benefits of eating up a good breakfast, already paid for, since lunch is both unknown and uncovered. You'll be dead by lunchtime, Michael Dillon thinks in the isolation of his secret knowledge. Don't worry about the Ulster fry.

Dillon, however, decides to tip off the police; the dining room of the Clarence Hotel is damaged, but no one is injured. Neither is Moira, for the teenage terrorists had fled from her living room even before the bomb was due to go off. The daughter of a Catholic butcher on the Falls road, Moira understands lies of silence. She knows in an instant that her husband bartered her life for other lives, just as she knows, without his having said anything, that he will leave her for another woman.

"So, it's better you say nothing," Detective Inspector Harry Randall counsels the estranged couple. But Moira goes on a campaign. Within hours she's on television.

Why does she do this? Why does she break the taboo of the tribe? Is it for those

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reasons she announces histrionically at dinner when her mother admonishes her to have sense? "It's people like us who're the only ones who can stop them," Moira says, agreeing with her father's outburst against the IRA. "I should tell the whole world what happened to us last night. I should tell the way they treated us.... My husband had to choose between saving his wife's life or saving the life of the likes of Pottinger. We should stand our ground. And then, if we're shot, the whole world will know why we're being shot."

Or is it that Moira gets caught up in her own rightness, and that the injury she's suffered is more personal than political? Her speech comes, at least in part, in bitter retaliation to her husband's silence after the bombing, his betrayal of her during it. Or is it simply that she enjoys the fuss of being the celebrity of the moment, rushed into makeup and onto the air? "Did you see me on the news?" she asks Michael. "Am I all right? My face, I mean?" she asks the producer of ther newscast. Moira is not one to forego the careful application of eyeliner, even if it is under the nervous eye of a young IRA gunman.

It's not Brian Moore's intention to show why Moira—or Michael or any of the other characters in *Lies of Silence*—do what they do. For though Moore has written wonderful novels that portray people of complexity and pathos, the characters in this novel are very little fleshed out, as though stick figures, stock figures, will do for the purpose he has at hand. That purpose is to make us turn pages, quickly, apprehensively; plot is the driving force of our fear. *Lies of Silence* is a thriller; it is a good thriller, tautly told, chilling. But it makes for disappointing reading nonetheless. It is too spare, too much itself a victim of Northern reticence. It feels shallow, as though with four films of previous novels behind him, Moore was writing it more with an eye to a film than to a reading audience. There is nothing here you couldn't learn in a two-hour movie. The genre of violence does violence to a complex, if contentious, history.

"Is there life before death?" Seamus Heaney quotes a graffitti slogan at the conclusion of his poem. There is not enough life in Brian Moore's new novel for us to care about the deaths which close it.

A GOOD PARADE

BEYOND NATIONALISM
A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918
Istvák Deák
Oxford University Press, $39.95, 286 pp.

Ivan Sanders

At a time when nationalism is on the march worldwide, and remaining multinational states are torn by ethnic strife, a fresh look at one of the most curious and colorful political formations, the Habsburg Monarchy, may seem especially opportune. A formidable power in the heart of Europe, Austria, and later Austria-Hungary, was inhabited by Germans, Slavs, Hungarians, Italians, Romanians, to name only the major nationalities, and ruled by German-speaking Habsburg kings who were distinctly un-German in their more tolerant, peaceable ways. Yet detractors of this patchwork empire always viewed it as an impossible creation, a "prison of nations," whose demise was hastened, if not caused, by the First World War. The tendency nowadays is to glamorize the old monarchy. And it's not only nostalgia buffs or diehard monarchists who get misty-eyed over its vanished glory. Disheartened republicans and radicals are just as likely to sing its praises, and confuse the monarchy's rich cultural

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legacy and still beguiling trappings with the system itself, which, by the end, was at least as unwieldy and sclerotic as the most recently demolished political structures in East Central Europe. (One of the more bizarre yet understandable consequences of communism's collapse in this region has been the resurfacing of assorted royal survivors, and the longing and loyalty they've awakened in people who until now may not have been aware that these exiled ex-kings and princes and heirs apparent were still around.)

It is up to historians to offer a more balanced judgment. István Deák, in his profusely documented monograph, makes very few sweeping statements about the monarchy as a whole, though he does note that there are "positive lessons" to be learned from the "Habsburg experiment," "while the post-1918 history of the Central and East Central European nation-states can only show us what to avoid." The Hungarian-born historian concentrates on the monarchy's showcase institution, the army, and demonstrates most convincingly that the multinational Habsburg officer corps was the glue that held the highly disparate empire together and kept domestic peace for much of the nineteenth century. The officers' deep attachment to the emperor, as well as to their comrades in arms, their regiment, did indeed contribute to the monarchy's longevity. We might also say that the empire survived as long as it did because for all its outward splendor it created institutions (including the army) that were ponderous, lackadaisical, benignly inefficient—slow to act and even slower to let go. "The Habsburg art of government," according to Italian Germanist Claudio Magris, "does not stifle dissidence or overcome contradictions but covers and composes them in an ever-provisional equilibrium." A dubious virtue, surely, though Magris and many others find it praiseworthy.

Deák, a more sober and hard-nosed historian, seems less impressed with artful theorizing about the Habsburg mystique. After studying the meticulously-kept personal files of hundreds of army officers, he knows well that they were not quite the enlightened and cultivated gentlemen literature and legend make them out to be. Habsburg liberalism definitely had limits. For example, military education, even after extensive reforms were instituted in 1867, remained a fairly one-sided affair in the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In reorganized, modernized military academies cadets could acquire a great deal of theoretical and practical knowledge, but what they were not taught, Deák tells us, "was the folklore, customs, problems, and aspirations of the monarchy's many peoples." For those taken by the system's worldly tolerance, it must be disappointing to learn that even during this liberal period, studying history in a military preparatory school was an exercise in provincialism. According to the official guidelines, "thought-provoking or critical presentations are to be avoided; on the other hand, every opportunity must be used to strengthen the patriotic and military consciousness of the pupils."

The combination of rigidity and laxity that characterized nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Habsburg institutions can be seen, on some level, as a reflection

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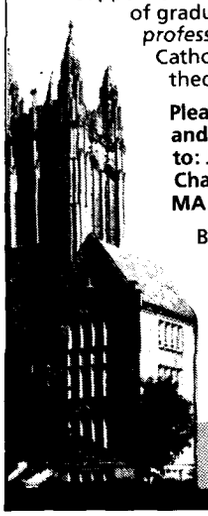

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of the oddly contradictory character of Emperor Francis Joseph himself, whose sixty-eight-year-long reign spanned almost the entire period examined by Deák. On the one hand, Francis Joseph was very much a premodern monarch: a distant and dour *grand seigneur* who distrusted telephones and refused to ride on an elevator. He was, at the same time, a petty bourgeois at heart with simple habits and tastes—an unassuming, limited, relentlessly mediocre man who could also be remarkably open-minded and tolerant of diversity in his empire. It was his dullness, perhaps, his reticence, his vacuity that enabled his subjects to see in him what they wished to see. In any case, he had a profound effect on his people. One could almost argue that to understand this soldier-king's obsession with proper conduct and outward form, and the air of unconcern and easygoing neglect it often masked, is to understand the world he ruled over, and even the cultural peculiarities of present-day lands that once made up his realm. The army was Francis Joseph's pride and joy, and what he loved most was a good parade. But by the end of the nineteenth century, that army's elite, with its Spanish etiquette, its arcane code of honor, its "suicidally handsome uniforms," as Deák puts it, was fast becoming an anachronism. And ironically enough, by the time the Habsburg army was finally beefed up and mechanized and readied for modern warfare, it had lost a lot of its glitter and flair, though it never became a truly first-rate fighting force either.

This army did have a significant afterlife, nevertheless. The figure of the Habsburg officer is ubiquitous in Central European literary culture and popular arts, and not just as a frivolous operetta character, a dashing heartthrob, but at times also as an anguished modern hero, a rebellious civilian in uniform. Even writers ill-disposed toward the monarchy evinced a certain fascination for the multinational army. And there were famous literary figures—Austrian Jewish novelist Joseph Roth, a former ensign, for example—who paid frequent tribute to its enlightened values.

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In a way, nothing demonstrated Habsburg liberalism more palpably than the army's receptivity to Jewish enlistees. True, their integration was not smooth, their numbers fluctuated, and they did tend to join the reserves, but the fact is that by the end of the First World War, Jews made up a significant portion of the Habsburg officer corps. In an epilogue to his book, Deák traces the varying fortunes of former Habsburg officers in postwar nation-states and their adjustment to new political realities in the 1930s and '40s. But there is a sadder postscript, on the fate of Jewish veterans: "The cruelest irony in the history of Central European Jewry centers on the decorations and frontline photographs Jewish World War I veterans left behind on the walls of their looted apartments while forced to make their way, during World War II, to the gas chambers."

Deák is right: compared to what followed, the Habsburg experiment seems infinitely more civilized and humane. But his relative perspective should be welcomed, too. For after all, the frightful historical baggage carried by the nascent democracies of contemporary East Central Europe also includes troublesome Habsburg freight. Unfortunately for some of these countries, real unity and harmony remain an elusive dream. □

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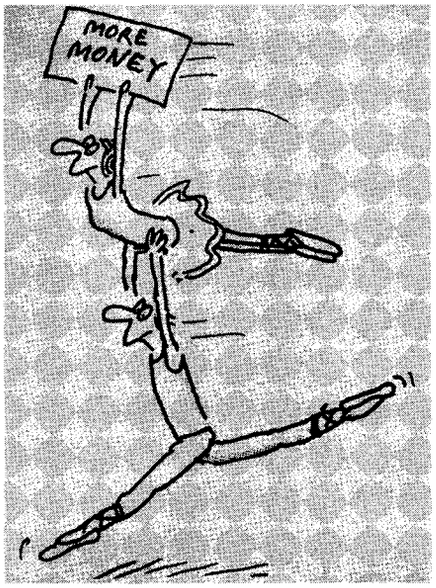

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